

AIDEN PIERCE

MARKED
BY
LUCIFER

THE DEVIL OWNS DOWNTOWN BOOK 2

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BY AIDEN PIERCE

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A Note from the Author

A WORD OF WARNING

Like the previous book in this series, *Marked by Lucifer* contains themes, scenes, and subject matter some may find unsettling or offensive. You will find that there are scenes in this book that are darker than the last, including a (light on the details) non-con scene, and some violence. If this doesn't bother you, continue on!

*“Our torments also may in length of time
become our Elements.”*

— John Milton, Paradise Lost

PROLOGUE



Once upon a time, I was considered to be a textbook “party girl.” We're talking hardcore, down the cheapest, paint-peeling bottle of vodka in a single night and still bust out the best moves on the dance floor in four-inch heels kind of girl. My alcohol tolerance, beer-pong-skills, and knack for pulling hot guys' phone numbers into my orbit were a thing of legend back in college. I could party all weekend and somehow be up at the butt crack of dawn Monday morning for finals and still managed to pull off an A, a fabled grade among my crowd.

Crazy weekends were the norm, and that carried on well after I graduated with my nursing degree and bagged a position at Seattle's best hospital. I'd work insane double shifts in the ER, care for my sick father back in the duplex I could barely afford and was lucky if I could manage a few hours of sleep every night. But no matter how torturous my week was, when Friday rolled around, relaxing wasn't anywhere to be found on my dubious list of priorities.

I'd always been one of those “I'll sleep when I'm dead” kind of people. Because the little voice in my head I'd coined as “Reckless Jess” pushed me to opt for a weekend itinerary that would have even the most intense adrenaline junkies blushing.

Sometimes it went beyond drinking, clubbing, jumping on the back of some biker's motorcycle to wake up in his bed the next day. There would be times I'd give in to the voice and impulsively buy a plane ticket to some random place, then barely make it back in time for work. All because some demented voice in my head was always pushing me to find whatever it was that would fill the hollow feeling in my heart.

Reckless Jess pushed me to do things that scared the shit out of me. Things that no woman ought to be doing in a dangerous city crawling with supernatural creatures that would be tickled pink by the thought of having me for breakfast.

Turns out, she was more than just a little voice in my head telling me to drink the Kool-Aid. Reckless Jess was my beast, the spirit of the demon that possessed my body, driving me to hunt for her long-lost mate. But no matter how stupidly insane my weekends could get, it was that same entity that got me home safe every Sunday night no matter what shit-storm she managed to stir up.

But this weekend was different.

This time around, I wouldn't be home in bed come Sunday night.

I wouldn't be going home at all.

This time that spirit inside me that shifters refer to as their “beast” had led me to the very thing

she'd been searching for. A lover from a life long gone, a life that seemed too impossible to have ever been mine. But thanks to Lucifer's tour through Hell, things were coming back to me.

Ancient memories were stirring. Feelings that had never really gone away were all rushing back to the surface.

Discovering you've lived an entire life eons ago as a demon shifter probably wouldn't sit right with most humans. But even when I thought I was "normal," I never really came close to the word. Heck, being the queen of the dead and the mate of Satan himself actually made a ton of sense. As bat shit insane as that may sound.

Turns out, he'd been looking for me too.

Thanks to the tour through the Hell we'd built together, I remembered exactly who I was.

I was still Jessica Sims. That wouldn't change. I still loved booze and parties and ordering way more than I could eat at Taco Bell after a 3 a.m. club hop. My best friends were still Melanie and her guardian angel, Gabriel. I still loved watching baseball games with my dad over TV dinners on his set of recliners that were probably as old as the demon spirit inside me.

But now, there was more to me than that. I was Lilith, Queen of Hell. A demon shifter born of darkness, destined for the light. And that light came in the form of a forsaken celestial with a masculine beauty that made my beast whine and my body ache.

My Light Bringer. My Morningstar.

My devilish mate.

Most of my memories from my old life had come back to me, but there were still muddled bits and pieces that hadn't yet surfaced. Like the moment I'd met Lucifer in the Ninth Circle. The details of that fateful day were hazy, but the way I'd felt when I'd first laid eyes on the celestial sat in my heart like a lover's ache. As a demon shifter born of the Eighth Circle, the notion of love was a foreign one back then.

Maybe I didn't know at the time that I already loved him. But I did know The Fates had sent him to me. The Fates had deemed him mine. The struggle was to get him to see it before he made his way out of the nine circles because his father had lied to him about his mate being some human.

Eve.

I didn't even know her. But back then, his blind devotion to her had been like driving a dagger deep into my heart and giving it a good twist for extra measure.

After he'd beat the crap out of Abaddon and took his crown like a toddler getting his toys confiscated, I'd offered to guide Lucifer to the surface. I never actually wanted him to leave. After all, why should he go crawling back to a human that wasn't his fated one and a father who cast him out for denying the natural nature of shifters?

My purpose was to convince him to stay in Hell, become its permanent king, and take me as his mate.

The journey through Hell with the sullied Son of God had been nightmare-fueled. We had starved together. We had walked until our legs were nothing more than ragged muscles and brittle bone. We witnessed the true horror of eternal suffering Abaddon had forced the human souls to endure in his hellish kingdom. From the ashes of the old king's destruction, we built something better, worthy of the new king who built it with his own sweat and blood rather than the pain and suffering of his subjects.

To say our journey was taxing would be the biggest damn understatement in all of time. The trials we'd encountered completely shattered us, again and again. Every time we thought we were broken beyond repair, we'd been there to put the other back together. Even when every fiber of our beings was begging, screaming at us to stop.

We never gave up.

We kept going.

We had pushed each other to limits we never knew we had.

Through our travels, we'd done much more than rebuild hell. We had rebuilt ourselves together. In doing so, we forged an unyielding bond that could withstand against the disapproval of the celestials, the hatred of Abaddon and those loyal to him, and even time itself.

And so the angel and the demon fell in love.

But our romance was never meant to escape Hell's dark embrace.

After Abaddon had let Lucifer's vindictive brother into Limbo, I was kidnapped and murdered.

But that hadn't been the end. I was then reincarnated. Lucifer said it had been his father to reincarnate me. If he hadn't, the deal they struck on Lucifer getting his wings back if he managed to find his fated mate would have been dead in the water. But I wasn't so sure. If I knew anything about the Almighty, it was that he didn't give two rat craps about his son.

Not that it mattered now.

My reunion with Lucifer had been a fleeting one, though. Abaddon, ex-king of Hell and ex-mate of mine, had been waiting for the moment I'd gotten my memories back to strike.

And strike he did, the fucking asshole. He used my own sister, threatening her life if I didn't go with him.

His plan was to kill me, of course. Now it all made sense why I'd been so apprehensive around the archdemon. Why he made my skin crawl and my stomach heave like a retributive night after a bad burrito. Our past was like something out of a dark and depraved myth of old. Although what had transpired between us was far from fantasy. The horrors he put me through had been very, *very* real.

It made me sick to my stomach just thinking about them.

On some level, I believed the monster thought he'd loved me at some point. But I knew the shifter wasn't capable of love. He'd forced me to be his queen and mate in front of thousands, and he got off on my humiliation.

He got off on my pain.

That wasn't love. It was a sort of intimate brutality that scarred me deeply.

He'd been waiting for his chance at revenge for me leaving him for Lucifer until I remembered the scars he'd given me. Just so he could inflict some more.

The thing was, I still wasn't afraid of him. What I was afraid of was him hurting my sister like he'd hurt me. Demons' souls weren't anything like humans'. Human souls went to the nine circles, forever to wander after death. But demon souls were sentimental. When their host's body ceased to exist, they would die with them. I didn't want that for my sister. Not when I knew some part of her was holding out on the hope that the triplets' father would return for her someday.

Better for Lucifer to continue on without me than for Nyx to be gone forever. He'd already gone this long without me. Still, it made my heart ache, thinking about just how many years he'd been searching the ends of the earth for me.

As I pulled myself out of Lucifer's arms and made my way toward the elevator where Abaddon held Nyx hostage, I thought about all the strength I would need to leave Lucifer again.

I stepped beside the archdemon who once haunted my darkest nightmares, holding my head high so he could see the flames of defiance that still burned strong inside me.

As the elevator doors slid shut, I caught one last glimpse of my fallen angel, My Morning Star. And the expression on his face as he watched me disappear from sight broke me a thousand times more than Abaddon had or ever could.



LUCIFER



“**B**leeding Christ!” I bellowed, slamming my fist into a nearby pillar. The marble cracked beneath the force of the blow, and the crystal chandeliers clacked as they quaked in the wake of my ire.

Nyx stood beside me, gaping at the elevator with tears in her eyes. I’d swear upon a Bible—in spite of the irony of it—that I’d experienced much pain in my cursed existence, but I could hardly bear to look at the expression on Nyx’s face. The anguish carved into her features was too representative of the agony crushing my chest as if the Empire State Building had been ripped up and relocated to my ribcage.

The world beyond the nine circles had always been under the misconception that I could feel no pain. That I was a master of inflicting it, nothing more. I’d always been misunderstood. Feared. Hated. Except by *her*. Lilith had always seen me as a person no one else seemed to see, including myself. I’d fallen in love with more than her coy smile, her wry wit, and the inextinguishable fire in her eyes. I’d fallen for the world as she saw it.

And I was about to lose her all over again.

“Sire... She *remembered* me. She knew me,” the demoness whispered on a choked sob. “No sooner than she got her memories back, she sacrificed herself for me. I didn’t even have a chance to say goodbye.”

I wanted to comfort her. But my mind had left the moment. My heartbeat was thrashing in my ear like a jet transporting me to another place. A dark place. A place where I couldn’t make out the details because all I could focus on was the fact that Abaddon was before me with the life slowly draining from his eyes as my hands slowly throttled him to death.

A place where I’d give him the sort of punishment worthy of humanity’s wild imagination. A punishment so brutal, tales would be sung of it for eons and for once, all the rumors about my depravity and my antipathy for mercy wouldn’t be an embellishment.

I would make Abaddon suffer the pain of a thousand deaths for taking her from me again.

Then after that, I’d punish myself.

Because this was all my fault.

For once, my misfortune wasn’t to be blamed on some cruel act of God. My father had always looked down on me. Maybe knowing what Michael and Abaddon were up to would make him smile with rueful glee because surely he hated seeing me with any shred of happiness. But this time, I’d

brought this misery on myself.

This was my payment for trusting Abaddon. I'd let his years of false loyalty trick me. It had all been a ruse, an act. All these years, and he hadn't changed. Deep down, I thought he was still in love with Lilith. Maybe I thought that love had changed him, that after all that had happened, he would be glad to see her happy in the end despite all the mistakes he made. But I was a fucking idiot for thinking his love for Lilith was anything close to the kind of love I had for her.

He never loved her. His kind of affection was a dark and twisted infatuation. One that would end in blood and murder if I allowed it.

He'd pretended to be loyal to me, that the crown and the mate I'd stolen from him was no skin off his nose. He'd made me think he could change, made me believe that *he* truly believed I was a better king and that he was happy for it.

How could I be such a dumb fuck?

Was I so desperate for his help that I actually overlooked his motives?

If my powers were strong enough to penetrate his damn skull, I would have gleaned all this from day one, and I wouldn't have wasted centuries building a fake friendship, buying into his games, trusting him.

Oh, Fates. If only Lilith hadn't hidden those memories from me all those years back.

But I couldn't blame her. The horrible things Abaddon had done to her were her secrets to hold. There was no obligation for her to share them with me.

My pulse went mad with rage as I dwelled on these new discoveries on the ancient relationship between the old king and the mate I stole from him. I knew Lilith never wanted to be queen, but I never would have guessed that he forced himself on her in front of the Eighth Circle's entire population. It was her right to hide it from me, but *why*? Was it her pride? Did she think if she suppressed it, the horrible memories of what he'd done to her would go away?

My vision went red.

I'd kill him.

I wouldn't make it quick, no. I'd rip him limb from limb. I'd peel his skin from his body, strip by strip. I'd pull out his talons, his teeth, pluck out his piercings one by one.

I was a rich and resourceful devil. Oh, the twisted torment I'd subject him to.

I'd make it last.

I'd make it satisfactory.

I would make him *bleed*. I'd make it painfully slow like I was tapping for syrup.

I'd pull out the eyes that dared look at her. I'd cut off the hands that touched her, slice the tongue that fed me all those lies. Then lastly, I'd cut off the cock that dared defile her. I would teach Abaddon a lesson. He was under the impression that I had stolen her from him. But that couldn't be further from the truth. He had stolen her long before I'd ever fallen from Heaven and knew the prayer of "Lilith" on my lips.

He had stolen her from her life, from herself. He'd robbed her of her pride, robbed her of a life when he'd given her to the celestials.

He'd taken everything from us.

"I'll make him suffer," I managed to rasp to Nyx. "But first, we'll get her back."

"How?" Nyx asked in a waif-thin whisper, her voice fraught with worry. "Won't he be taking her to the surface?"

"Maybe that's his plan. But Jessica will know to stall. Once they step out of Limbo and into Siren's, she'll be in grave danger. Michael could pluck her right up, just like last time. If I know my

mate, she'll be smart and dangle the opportunity for Abaddon to take his retribution in flesh."

Nyx shivered. "You mean—"

"I suspect she might try to seduce him, yes. It's probably the only thing that would make him change his mind about handing her over to my brother. He let Michael have all the 'fun' last time. I doubt Abaddon will pass on the opportunity to be the one to fuck and kill her a second time around. She'll draw it out as long as she can so that I might catch up to them."

The prospect of the demon even touching what was mine made my entire body burn with hatred, the bitter taste of ash heavy on my taste buds.

"Order every single capable man we have on each layer to guard the elevator entrance and the old service tunnels—"

The look on Nyx's face was enough to make the feeble plan die before I'd finished its construction. "Sire, that won't work. He has the crown."

Any hope I'd been holding onto was flung from my heart like the oars from a lifeboat adrift at sea. The crown had the power to command all subjects of the nine circles. I never had a use for the dusty old relic once I got the hang of the power without the need to wear the gaudy thing. I didn't even know where I'd last left the damn thing. I left things like that to Abaddon.

Stupid, stupid, *stupid*.

I hadn't had a chance to tell Jessica yet, but over the years, I'd come to suspect that she and her sister were half archdemon. They never knew where their parents hailed from, and the fact that both of them were so powerful, often resisting my ability to read minds and were completely insusceptible to the magic of the crown just reinforced my theory. So at least Abaddon couldn't force Jess as easily as brandishing the crown and commanding her.

At least, so I prayed, and I wasn't a praying man.

But she was human now. With no wings, she hadn't the ability to shift and let loose the demon spirit inside her. She'd be weaker. She'd have to use her cunning to stall him and lay all hope on me catching up with them in time.

Smashing the button on the elevator, the doors peeled open with a crisp ding. Stepping inside, I gave pause and closed my eyes, probing the bond that had been reforged between us.

Now that we were mated once again, she bore my mark.

The scent of the devil.

The connection between us was like an invisible cord, one end threaded through her heart and the other end through mine. I'd missed that sensation, the feeling that she was always with me even if she wasn't.

For other males, the mark upon her would serve as a warning to stay away. For me, the scent would help me track her, even if she was halfway across the world. There that mark would be seared into her flesh until another male mated or murdered her. In Abaddon's case, he'd likely try both.

As I expected, I could sense they hadn't left Hell. Yet.

Thinking about the ways she might be stalling him made my stomach heave. Whatever her plan, I was glad for it. There was still a chance to catch up with them in time.

Nyx slapped a hand on the elevator door, keeping it from closing. "Sire, may I come with you? I might be able to help. Abaddon was strong enough to overpower me physically, but I can resist the power of the crown."

I gave a grave shake of my head. "I'm sorry, Nyx. But your sister made a great sacrifice in rescuing you from Abaddon's clutches. We don't want to risk you getting hurt, else she will feel as though her actions were made in vain."

“Very well, Sire. I understand. But can I ask you something before you go?” the demoness queried on a sharp exhale as if keeping in her question was physically paining her. “Do you think this is the will of The Fates? Do you think they planned this to test us?”

“It’s impossible to say for sure, old friend. As mysterious as they are, they are your daughters, and they love you. For that, you are lucky. I’m sure they would never plan for their own aunt’s demise. Not when this kingdom sorely needs its queen back. We all need Jessica back. But I don’t need to know the will of The Fates to know one thing.”

“And what’s that, My King?”

“This is Abaddon’s final hour. Of that, I am certain.”



My body swayed, and my knees threatened to buckle beneath me, but Abaddon's bruising grip on my arm held me up. His bare skin against mine made my stomach churn in repulsion, and when I jerked in vain attempts to free myself, his cavernous chuckle filled the elevator, making my bones rattle.

"Struggle all you want, My Queen. Now that you've got all your memories back, you know I like it when you fight me."

My skull split with excruciating pain as my beast clawed at my insides, desperate to free herself so she could kill this fucker. If only I'd given into her all those years ago in the Fourth Circle, when Abaddon was on his knees before us with his guts wrapped around our claws.

But regrets sat in the pit of my belly like stones.

It all made sense now, why the tattooed behemoth called me his queen, the mocking bite of his tone, the way his gaze always followed me, hot and heavy on my skin.

Once-upon-a-fucked-up-time, I *had* been his queen. In his mind, I'd belonged to him. Didn't matter that he had claimed me by force. I was as much his possession as the crown that now hung at his hip.

I hadn't been ready for any of this. I hadn't been ready for the blast of memories from another life to drench me, leaving me stinging and cold like I'd gotten doused with a firehose. I hadn't been ready for Lucifer and everything that came along with him. The magic between us had been disorienting. Everything from the way he looked at me, how the warmth in his eyes took away the edge of his sharp features, how his cold and imposing exterior melted whenever he touched me, was disorienting. He had felt so wonderful. So safe. Strong and masculine. A huge step up from the college-age twats I normally ended up in bed with. The King of Hell felt like absolute fucking heaven inside me. Who needed the real thing when I could have paradise in a package like the one between Lucifer Morningstar's legs.

Even though some of my memories had yet to come back to me, I knew he was who he said he was. I'm his fated one. The magic between us was a testament to that.

While I hadn't been prepared to fall in love with the devil over what was supposed to be a relaxing weekend filled with drinks with Mel and maybe a baseball game with dad, I definitely wasn't ready to sacrifice myself to my abusive ex-husband.

As soon as the elevator doors snapped shut and Abaddon pressed the “L” button to take us up to Limbo, it was all I could do to keep my shit together.

As crazy as it was to say, I couldn’t let him take me out of Hell. As soon as he did, it was likely that Michael or the celestials working for him would be there to haul me off, ready to murder me a second time.

Think, Jess. Fucking *think*.

“That’s why you didn’t take me to Michael when you picked me up from my place to take me to Canlis, isn’t it? You wanted me to remember you before the celestials kill me.”

It was terrifying addressing the man who’d hurt me, but to even call him a man right now was a stretch. He was a monster in every sense of the word. His stature was so great, it took up most of the elevator, leaving little room for me. The flesh of his true form was the color of steel, the only color on his skin being the elaborate mural of satanic runes covering his chest and forearms. His razor-sharp teeth glinted in the elevator’s fluorescent lighting as his lips peeled back into a baleful grin.

“That’s right,” he seethed, leering down at me. He took a step closer, and I instinctively took one back. But there was no place to run. I was trapped, practically smashed up against him with no room left between us. The heat rolling off him was like standing next to a furnace. His leathery wing curved around my body like a hellish hug and pulled me up so that his mouth was level to my ear. I cringed at the touch of his grinning lips against my skin.

“I wanted to see all that hatred filling up your pretty eyes when the celestials drag you away. I love when your face twists up like it is now, carved with so much loathing.” His tongue flicked out, dragging over my neck, rough and slimy over my flesh. A dark cackle split my ear as he watched me struggle against him. “Because damn, does it make me hard, My Queen.”

Everything inside me turned to stone as the demon pressed my back up against the elevator, imprisoning me between the cold steel and hard muscle. I could feel every inch of him. The sandpapery drag of his tongue on my flesh, the ripple of his abdomen against my belly, the thick meat of his hunger jabbing into my thigh.

Even the archdemon’s scent was invasive. And yet, the small enclosure still smelt faintly of Lucifer’s smoky musk. Its flavor in my nostrils was the only thing keeping me from audibly retching as Abaddon’s metallic breath slithered inside my mouth. His grunts in my ear, his dark chuckle as he tasted the frantic hammer of my pulse, his crushing grip... It all took me back to a dark place.

Using every fiber of my willpower, I forced my lips into a smug smirk and centered my gaze on his.

“If you get off on my hatred so much, why give the satisfaction of my suffering over to the celestials? You despise them.”

“I hate Lucifer more,” he snarled through a manic grin. “You should have seen his face when he discovered Michael had broken into Limbo and stolen his precious mate right out from underneath him.”

Flashes of that horrible day were trickling back. I could still feel the warmth of Lucifer’s lips on mine with his parting kiss as he went to fetch the last of my things. We were supposed to leave the nine circles that day. Our centuries-long trek through Hell had finally come to an end, and I had been wrestling with a wine cask to celebrate the journey when I felt a gust of wind. The door to the cellar had opened, and I turned, expecting to see Lucifer there. Instead, it had been another celestial.

I’d never seen Michael before, but I knew who he was the moment I saw him. And I knew by the evil glint in his eye why he was there.

He’d been too strong for me, even in my true form. He overpowered me in seconds, and when

he'd dragged me out to the surface, Abaddon had been there to rub in his betrayal. I still couldn't remember much of what happened after that. White clouds. Whispered voices. Rough hands. The glint of a dagger. The sudden stab of excruciating pain. Then nothing.

"Except he didn't break in. You let him in. You gave me to Michael."

"That's right. All these years of kissing Lucifer's ass, pretending like I just forgot that he stole my crown and my queen will almost be worth it, seeing it a second time."

"Why the long game? Why not try to kill him?"

Abaddon shrugged his massive shoulders, momentarily blocking out the fluorescent light, shadows swallowing my frame. "The celestials want to be the ones to kill him. Once he follows us to the surface, they'll be ready for him this time. If you're lucky, they might even kill you together. Wouldn't that be romantic? And once you're both gone, I'll be able to reclaim Hell's throne."

"What if I'm reincarnated again?"

"God reincarnated you so he could hold up his end of that stupid deal he struck with Lucifer. The one where Lucifer could get his wings back if he found his fated mate and could prove it. But he won't reincarnate you if his son is dead. There would be no reason to."

Something wasn't adding up. If God didn't care enough about his son to stop Michael from killing him, why would he care enough to offer Lucifer a way to get his wings back by going as far as to bring back his fated one? It didn't make any damn sense.

"Even if you are reincarnated, what's it matter?" Abaddon challenged, his spittle flecking my face, yanking me out from my thoughts. "You won't come back with your memories. Celestials and demons are gone forever once they die, so Lucifer won't be finding you again."

The half-assed plan that began to unfurl in my head was as shaky as all these old memories flooding back to me. But if I knew anything about Abaddon the Destroyer, he wouldn't be able to resist the temptation of killing me himself if there was something in it for him. Something he'd always lusted for.

Pain and suffering were brought by his own hand. Or, in this case, maybe his cock. Who knows how long he had gone without getting his fix. He wouldn't have been able to wreak the sort of havoc he did back in the day while under Lucifer's watch.

I couldn't blame Lucifer for thinking the demon had changed. Hundreds of years of acting like an almost normal person, you'd think would change a man. But no. Abaddon was all bent up. He was like a shaken bottle of soda, and now he needed a place to explode. After so many years plotting his revenge, he wanted more satisfaction than witnessing mine and Lucifer's demise under the hand of someone else he hated. Especially a second time.

That was my only shot of stalling him, and it was a dangerous one. Not only that, it was bat-shit insane. Not to mention the mere thought of it made me want to vomit. But for the sake of making it convincing, I'd have to keep any puke out of the equation.

"So that's it?" I gave a dry cackle. "That's your big revenge? You do all the hard work, then you stand by and watch as the celestials reap the rewards? Why should they get to kill us? Why shouldn't it be your hand that deals the final blow? Why shouldn't your face be the last we see?"

The demon's eyes slitted. "You're going to die either way. What do you care who does it?"

"You're not the only one who hates the celestials. You and I have a past. I may love Lucifer, but even I can admit that I fucked you over. You deserve your pound of flesh."

I'd never been much of an actor, but that one semester I took that theater elective must have paid off because Abaddon was drinking up every word I managed to push out, my tone dark and sultry. "At least we can have a little fun before I go."

Since he still had me pinned between him and the elevator wall, it wasn't like I had to convey my meaning. I ground my pelvis into the mass of his thigh, biting my lip which probably looked enticing when in reality, it was to hold back a shudder.

The demon's monster-sized cock swelled, urged on by my depraved suggestion. He could probably see my contempt for him under the thin layer of my act. But by the lick of his grinning lips and the deep, guttural purr rumbling from his chest, he didn't care.

"So desperate to stay alive that you'd fuck the monster about to kill you? Damn, you really are my mate."

My throat burned with a venomous rebuttal. I was never his, not really. But I couldn't let Michael and Abaddon tear me away from my true mate for the second time. I had to give this everything I had...

The beast inside me was writhing in her rage. If I still had my wings, there would be no holding her back. She'd shift and rip apart our abuser. And I'd let her. But we didn't have that option anymore. My guts twisted with trepidation as I realized Sane Jess was going to have to steer the ship on this one, not Reckless.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I tamped down on my nerves and wrapped my arms around Abaddon's neck. Using every shred of my imagination, I thought of Lucifer.

My eyelids fluttered shut as phantom sensations ghosted over my skin, making my lower belly flood with warmth. A swamp of heat tickled between my legs, where I could almost feel the silken strokes of Lucifer's tongue. And the bruised flesh of my hips where he'd hungrily gripped my thighs, whispering dirty, unholy promises into my cunt while he licked me until I melted.

The orgasm he'd given me had been world-shaking, my senses splitting as I had gripped onto his shoulders for dear life. But coming apart around his mouth had been nothing compared to the violent, mind-shattering climax brought on by the thick, swollen mass of his cock. I was lost to that moment. So sweet, so perfect. My breath rushed out at the fresh memory, bubbles of need rushing through my veins, making my blood grow hot. Huge hands gripped my breasts, and a deep, throaty groan feathered over my lips and face. Then wings tightened around me, pulling me flush against taut muscles.

Wings.

My eyelids flung open just in time to see Abaddon's mouth closing in on mine. His kiss was just like him. Brutal. Unrelenting. Cruel. It ate me alive, devouring me from the inside out. His fangs gnashed my lips, and one beat of my heart later, the bitter tang of blood flooded my mouth.

I bucked against him, my cries of protest smothered by his demon maw attached to my face, sucking me like a leech. When I slammed my teeth down onto his tongue, he broke the kiss, a wicked grin twisting his blood-stained lips.

"Do you remember, My Queen? Does this bring you back to the day we met? Remember how I claimed you in front of them all." The chilling blue of his eyes twinkled with fondness like he was recalling a sweet wedding day with me dressed in white, walking down the aisle. His grin turned lethal. "Remember how you fought me? Your attempts were so pathetic but cute."

Abaddon brushed my lower lip with the pad of his thumb, smearing my blood across my skin like an unholy sacrament.

"He may have won you in the end, but if I have anything over Lucifer, it's the fact that I broke in that sweet little hole of yours first."

My chest burned with bile as the memories of that shit day came ebbing back.

My beast remembered too. Like a breaking dam, the memories of that bleak day came crashing

down over me, searing my mind like a cigarette burn stamped into my brain.



The Eighth Circle - Past

I'd always hated crowds.

In the Eighth Circle, gatherings were always gruesome occasions. This deep in the bowels of hell, the layer where the fraudulent souls were sent to be tortured, was the place among the savage wastes where some of the most brutal and barbaric demons roamed.

Here it was hot, filled with hellfire and brimstone. The landscape was treacherous, filled with jagged mountain ridges and deep trenches scattered between. Nestled in the center of the mountains was a flat plateau of dried magma where the occasional crack ran deep in the igneous rock where steam rose up, and molten lava could be seen deep below. It was like a hellish amphitheater. When souls and native demons gathered here, it was a location fit for a bloody spectacle.

Sweaty, sticky bodies in dense numbers would gather, usually for public beatings and executions. Murder was commonplace this deep in hell. Most of the shifters here didn't care about the lack of an afterlife for our own kind.

Here, death happened on the daily. So while a particular demon's demise was interesting enough to draw large numbers, it meant the monster had made a lot of enemies and probably had it coming. That or they were a halfway decent person, and down here, decency rubbed most demons the wrong way. But here it was tomato–tomatoe. They always ended up the same, face down in a pile of their own blood.

But today was different. "Special."

Today was the day the king of Hell would select a queen.

This king was new, a young and powerful shifter who was easily twice the size of most males. Demon shifters lived a long time, so any given king could reign for eons. That is until a new challenger rose up and tore off his head, with it earning the crown.

There were rumors about this new king. Rumors that he was an archdemon, a powerful and rare kind of demon. No one knew exactly where their species came from. But this one named Abaddon had seemingly come from nowhere and ripped off the old king's head with his bare hands.

So far, it would seem that this new king was curious enough of the reigning monarch's traditions to uphold them. At least when it came to the barbaric task of picking a mate and queen for himself.

I hadn't been born yet when the last king had selected his mate, but I heard the stories of the vicious tradition.

Whenever a male had managed to defeat a king in a battle of brawn and might, he earned the crown, which had the power to compel all souls and native demons. It was a long-standing tradition for the new king to select a mate from the crowd and "mark" her as his mate by fucking her in front of all the citizens of her native circle. That wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't a sick preference for the last handful of kings to use the crown to compel the crowd and select a female who showed any kind of resistance.

Where was the sport if they were a willing victim?

The last king had selected his queen on the second circle. The upper levels were easier to fair, meaning the females were softer, more gentle, easy to tame and dominate. Down here in the most savage levels, the women were hardened. We were accustomed to fighting off males stupid enough to try to mate us against our will.

The fact that this archdemon was coming all the way down here meant he wasn't looking for a soft, fair queen.

He was looking for a challenge.

"God have mercy on the poor woman the new king sets his sights on," my sister muttered beneath her breath beside me, clearly in the same headspace as me.

"God doesn't care for what dwells below his precious gardens on the surface, Nyx."

I cast a sideways glance at my pregnant sister, the lavender skin of her beast form peppered with little droplets of sweat. Thousands of us had been standing out on the magma rock planes for what felt like an eternity, where we waited for our new king to show. Thick curtains of steam wafted from cracks below, the sweltering heat making my own peachy flesh perspire."

"You better shift," Nyx advised me through a frown, disapproval mixed with worry making her eyes flash as they ran down my human form. "You're going to stand out like a mouse among wolves if you don't. If you're not interested in being queen, standing out isn't a good idea."

"There are a million women here, Nyx. There's more likelihood of a star falling down here than the king looking twice at me. I'm more worried about you."

My gaze dropped to the curve of my sister's swollen belly. This was no place for a pregnant woman in her third trimester. "It's too hot out here. You should go back home." Home was just a cave in a network of hundreds in the southern mountain ridge called Devil's Head. But at least there it was, cool and safe—*safer*. I would have insisted she stay there, but the king's grunts had done a sweep of the entire circle, poking and prodding demons and even some souls from their hidey holes to all pay their respects to the new king and bear witness to his claiming a queen.

"No." She shook her head, her black as death hair swirling around her shoulders with the movement. "They'll notice me sneak away now and today is not the day for a woman to stand out from the crowd."

My mouth curled into a bleak smile devoid of any mirth. "At least you're already claimed. The king won't want a mated, impregnated demoness as his queen."

Nyx mirrored my somber smile, but the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes were etched with pain. She had been claimed and mated by a male some months ago, an archdemon by my guess. She had grown quite fond of him. She'd even thought he might be her true mate. But I knew there was no such thing as fate in the Underworld. It was all random chance. Only the lucky survived for a short time. And the strong could last forever. Erebus had been as mysterious as a cool breeze through this arid pit of Hell and had disappeared to wherever he'd come from just as quickly as he'd arrived.

My sister had a tight belief he would return, that she would forgive him for leaving the moment he made his way back to her.

But I wouldn't forgive so easily. Not when he'd left my sister pregnant and alone.

Thinking of the handsome as sin male made my head swim with fury. I hated that suave, enigmatic demon for the way he'd managed to sweep into our lives and make me believe for just a moment that male kind could be more than selfish monsters. But the moment I'd let my guard down, he'd turned and left her like she was nothing.

All we had was each other until our luck finally ran out.

That's all we ever had, was each other. Our mother had died in childbirth, and our father had pried us from her dead arms and threw us out no sooner than when we'd been wiped clean of our mother's blood.

Some would call it a miracle that we'd survived this long. But miracles didn't happen. Not in Hell, and especially not in the Eighth Circle.

We'd managed to make it this long because we were strong, and nothing could break us.

"I still think you should shift," she muttered with a grave shift of her head.

I didn't bother responding this time because my answer would be no different. I was not exactly "at one" with the demon spirit inside me like all the other shifters. For them, they seemed more monster than man, and their humanity sat in the backseat. My beast was the passenger in this outfit. She was my way of protecting myself in emergency situations. That was it.

"*Resentful, much?*" she growled in my ear. Like I did most of the time, I ignored her.

Skimming my gaze over the crowd, I was aghast by the sheer numbers that had gathered. Thousands stretched so far the bodies blurred far into the horizon where the black magma rock melded into the mountains.

"So many," I muttered, shaking my head in disbelief. The king's guards had shoved all the women to the front, but even so, there was a one in a few thousand chance of being the one picked.

My stomach knotted as I watched so many females, pushing and shoving to get to the front. Most of them would kill for the honor of being queen. The title came with power and protection. It was the best most women down here could hope for.

To me, the thought of serving as the premier fuck-hole for the most brutal being in all the Underworld wasn't worth it. Maybe I would have softer feelings for this new brute if the ritual to select a mate was different. Consensual. But this new king was no different than the last if he insisted on plucking out a stranger from the crowd to subject her to such humiliation.

"Where is he? I want to get this over with," I whispered to Nyx.

"Looks like he's coming..." my twin answered back, her grim expression tilted up toward the cliffside where a cluster of several guards had appeared. Wild whispers and frantic mutters ripped through the crowd as the group of guards parted, allowing a new figure to appear.

My jaw dropped, my beast almost as stunned as me as we angled our heads to gap at the demon who stepped over a crack in the igneous rock, the curtain of steam coiling around bulging muscles wrapped in silvery flesh.

There was a ripple of murmurs over the crowd as we all laid eyes on our new king.

As expected, he'd chosen to make his appearance in his true form. And unholy hellfire, what a first impression it was.

While there were some breeds of demons who were small in size, such as imps and some satyrs, most males were fairly large. Large males weren't uncommon, but this fiend was *massive*, standing at least two if not three heads over most of his men. He had the stature of a titan, with mammoth thighs

that were easily the girth of my waist. He had black leathery wings and giant black horns with razor-sharp tips. His skin was covered in dark ink, his flesh marred with a mural of ancient runes I couldn't decipher.

The muttering among the crowd turned from subdued curiosity to shocked horror, charging the air with an energy that raised the hairs on my nape.

"Is he wearing...?" Nyx gasped in my ear, her tone fraught with repulsion.

The new king was clothed in nothing but a tattered piece of hide with a belt of bone wrapped around his hips. The color of the hide was a deep purple. There was no animal in all the nine circles that color. No demon, for that matter, save one.

"The old king," I muttered beneath my breath. "He skinned the old king as a means to cover himself."

Purple had been a rare scale color for a demon way back when. Long before I was even seed in my sire's berries. But when the last king took up the throne, he had all other demons with the same scale color slaughtered. Purple was for royalty alone, he'd declared.

So the mystery of who this new king wore around himself wasn't a hard one to crack.

"I bet those bones are his too," my twin tutted.

The iron crown the new king wore on his head almost seemed small on him, but it wasn't in a funny way. It just accentuated his impossible mass. And by the way the flap of the old king's skin poked out, struggling to contain what lay beneath, that which sat on his shoulders wasn't the only gigantic head of his.

"I feel sorry for the poor woman who ends up beneath *that* tonight."

"Don't," Nyx sniffed. "There are plenty here who would kill to be queen."

I gave a grim nod. That was easy to believe when most women here would kill for a handful of berries, let alone for a place beside the king.

In all likelihood, the king would select some sultry succubus. Maybe with black or white scales, since those were the most coveted types, at least on this layer. Meanwhile, the peachy white skin of my secondary form wouldn't make me stand out from the human souls sprinkled through the crowd.

Even from this distance, I could make out the penetrating blue of the archdemon's eyes. It was a rare color in Hell. They skimmed the crowd with steady, languid scrutiny as if taking in the details of every single face.

I rolled my eyes in my sister's direction. "We might be here for a while."

"Shh," several voices around me urged as the king began to speak. But when he opened his mouth, no words came. Instead, a great bellow of a growl left his lips that managed to rise above the screams of those closest in the crowd. One of his own guards came up behind him with spear drawn, ready to stab him in the back.

It wasn't surprising, really, not when every single demon in all nine circles wanted to be king. Why wouldn't they? It was the best you could do for yourself in this burning shithole. Powerful demons strong enough to resist the power of the crown for even a few seconds would try to challenge him often. And there was no better place to do it than here where all could witness the victory, should the fight turn in their favor. Unfortunately, this one wasn't so lucky.

The king turned so fast—it was incredible anything so huge could move so quickly. He grabbed the spear thrusting it toward the guard's abdomen, snapping it in half with a squeeze of his fingers. Then he thrust his other fist straight into the guard's ribcage, the sound of cracking bones welding with the gurgled cries of his attacker. Within a single thud of my heart, the demon crumbled to the crowd, and the king held a bloody fist over his head, bellowing at the crowd, a warning to all those stupid

enough to follow in the guard's footsteps.

It was the still-beating heart of the king's attacker, weeping gobs of blood that dribbled between his thick fingers, streaking his gray skin in gore.

The crowd murmured its approval, all the male heads bobbing their sanction while some of the females shoved closer for a chance to be selected.

It all made me want to puke.

What was wrong with Nyx and me that we were the only ones not entertained nor impressed by the show?

"I am called Abaddon the Destroyer. And now you know why. I am your new king, your master." The archdemon's cavernous bellow spread over the crowd, making everyone flinch beneath its imposing density. "Bow before me, or your blood too shall paint my skin!"

Abaddon the Destroyer. I thought the name was stupid the first time I'd heard whispers of it. Now, it seemed appropriate. He'd broken the brave fool who'd challenge him without a flinch. And he'd likely break the woman he was about to select from the crowd. Only, she wouldn't have the fortune of having it be over so quickly.

There was a sudden pulsation of energy that swelled over the crowd, and everyone bent at the waist into a deep bow almost as one, perfectly in sync. Nyx and I exchanged a look, and we realized at the same time, it was the power of the crown compelling the crowd.

And that we were completely immune to its power.

So we hastily moved to follow the rest of the crowd. Resistance to the crown was not something you wanted the king to know about if you had any intention of living.

Nyx and I bowed with the rest, although perhaps, a few seconds too slow because when I dared to glance up at the cliff, my pounding heart lodged itself in my throat. As I feared, we were delayed just long enough to catch the king's eye. His blue gaze was pinned on us, shifting to my sister's pregnant belly and then to me.

An eternity seemed to pass as I waited, trepidation weighing heavy in my stomach and prickling my insides like I'd swallowed a rusty club.

Then, my worst nightmares became a reality when he slowly raised a meaty finger and pointed at me. "Come here."



Living in the Eighth Circle was a nightmare I could never wake up from. The chaos and brutality of it all were my normal.

After all, this was home to only the vilest of demons and human souls. How I ended up here, who knows. At least it had made me strong.

Nothing could break me.

But it seemed this new king was going to try.

I thought nothing could scare me anymore. But there wasn't a damn thing that could have prepared me for the wave of sickening horror that crashed down over me like an avalanche of crumbling stone.

I stared at the finger summoning me.

Come here.

His order echoed in my ear, again and again. Then, in my other ear, the voice of my demon.

Run.

No, I couldn't.

I stood in the middle of a crowd of thousands. I wouldn't make it out of here. Maybe if I shifted, I could fly away, but then I'd be leaving my pregnant sister behind. They would punish her instead for her sister dishonoring the king. I wouldn't do that to her.

My mind had launched into a panicked gallop.

Why me? Maybe I was resistant to the crown's power but wasn't it more likely that I just had slow reflexes? Why would he want a slow female who preferred to appear in her weaker form?

But all eyes were on me, and the only one who looked at me with pity was Nyx. The rest regarded me with a mixture of jealousy and anger for my hesitation.

My sister was as white as a sheet. "You can run. Don't worry about me."

She knew before the words were out of her mouth that I'd already decided to hold my ground. Even if she wasn't pregnant, even if she could escape with me, there were some here who knew our home was in the caverns beneath Devil's Head Mountain. They'd come for us, and they'd make us pay for insulting the king.

Urging my feet to move forward felt like what I imagined wading through the Mire of Gluttons on the Third Circle to be like.

The demon spirit inside me was resistant, but she seemed to understand that running would only make things worse.

I know I'm not very kind to you, I said to my beast inside. You probably think I resent you. But

please. Protect me in this moment, if you can.

There was a beat of silence. Then she answered.

“Always.”

Steeling my nerves, I pushed my way forward, making my way around the cliff where the magma had sloped and cooled, creating a bridge.

I could feel everyone’s eyes on me, but his were the heaviest of all. Their intent curiosity made me burn, and I wished in that moment I would. That I would turn to ash and blow away on the wind.

But right now, I’d count that as a miracle. And miracles didn’t happen in the Eighth Circle.

As I approached the archdemon, my skin began to prickle, and my breaths went sharp. The air was thick with his power. It was almost like there was less oxygen in his vicinity. Like his intensity smothered all chance of possible life anywhere in his proximity.

My stomach flipped when I lifted my eyes and found my gaze locked with Abaddon’s.

He was even more striking in person. Almost handsome, if it wasn’t for the blood of the guard spattering his steely flesh. My attention briefly dropped to the headless body.

Was this how it was supposed to be? Was he really about to claim me in front of all these monsters, covered in gore, with a dead man not a few feet away?

“Focus, don’t let him see your fear.”

I did as my beast advised and forced my gaze back to the king with my chin held high.

He canted his head, his expression unreadable. “What’s your name?”

“Lilith, My King.”

“Why do you choose to appear before me in your lesser form?”

“I prefer it.”

“Don’t you fear others will perceive you as weak?”

“Many have made that mistake, and for many, it’s been their last, Sire.”

His blue eyes glittered with amusement, a strange combination with the streaks of red across his face. “You are strong.”

“All females here that still have breath in their bodies are strong.”

He rubbed his chin, his eyes narrowing with thought. “No, you’re different. Let me see your true form.”

I swallowed so hard it hurt. This was the part where I had to make a decision. Fight, or be the good little whore for the new king.

Either option would end in regret.

The least I could do was choose the option that would allow me to hold onto my pride for just a bit longer, even if it meant being ripped away from me. I wouldn’t betray myself by doing nothing.

“I don’t like letting my beast out. She’s dangerous. I’m doing everyone a favor, really.”

“You have a sense of humor. Didn’t think that capable of the barbarians this deep in Hell.”

“You’d be surprised what I’m capable of, Sire.” I held his gaze, keeping my face void of all emotion.

In short, don’t fuck with me.

But I had a sickening feeling that he was going to do just that.

Fighting off the urge to flee, I held my ground as he slowly strode forward. The Underrealm watched as the most powerful being in it slowly descended to one knee before me and held up a bloody offering.

My heart squeezed when I saw it was the guard’s heart, still clutched between his fingers.

“For my new queen.”

Everything around me froze as I stared down at the organ in his palm.

“What if I don’t want it?” I found myself whispering, too low for anyone else to hear.

There’s no turning back now.

For the briefest moment, a flicker of rage flashed across his face like a clap of thunder and was gone the next second, replaced with something way more terrifying.

Excitement.

My insides twisted around to the point of pain. I’d pegged him right. He was looking for a challenge, a rebel amongst a sea of women who’d kill for the chance to please him.

At least I could commend him on pegging me as his kind of mate. Too bad he wasn’t mine.

“You’d refuse me?” His brows raised but he didn’t look surprised. He looked pleased.

My tongue went lame in my mouth, unable to speak. “I don’t want to be queen.”

“And what do you want?”

The question threw me off. What did I want? My life had always been about survival. But I had to want more than that.

Maybe a good king, a just king. Someone who categorized strength as more than physical prowess. Someone to clean up this mess. I’d like a safe realm for my niece or nephew to grow up in once they were born. And since I was dreaming here, I’d like to find my true mate.

I didn’t really believe in fate. It was nice to pretend for a second that maybe there was a male who was as gentle as he was firm. Someone...good. But a good man around here would take a damn miracle.

“You couldn’t give me anything I want, Sire.”

“Let me try?”

“Do I actually get a choice in the matter?”

His gaze trailed to the crowd, who all watched us with bated breath, then to his guards. When he centered his blue eyes back on me, they were colder than before. “No. Understand, if I let you defy me, the others will follow. Your first duty as queen is to teach the others to fear me.”

I took a step back, and then another. “I don’t want you. But I don’t fear you.”

The heart fell from his hand with a sickening thud as he pushed to his feet. A sadistic grin stretched his lips as he rolled his shoulders. “We’ll see about that. Now, get back here and shift. Show your king the true form of his mate.”

His command was teeming with the power of the crown. But once again, it had no effect over me. The demon chuckled. “You *are* strong. That’s good. You’ll need that to endure me.”

My stomach heaved with dread. I moved to run. But in one easy stride, he was looming over me, his shadow consuming my small frame. He grabbed me by the arm, his grip crushing and cruel.

That’s when my demon took over.

She burst to the surface, and for one excruciating moment, it felt like all my bones were breaking, my skin being ripped off. Then the piercing agony was gone as quick as it had come.

“There’s my beautiful queen,” the king said through a grating chuckle that scraped over my scales like jagged metal.

I had every ability to fight my beast and take control over our body in our demonic form. But there was a strong pull from her; she wanted to fight for us. So I let her. I descended into the back of my mind, watching behind a haze of dark thoughts as she fought the terrifying male.

She lasted for so long. Almost holding her own, dodging his blows and moving around him as fast as lightning. She didn’t want us to run anymore.

She was intent on killing him.

There were a few times she got close, talons slicing toward his throat. But the third time she tried that, he caught our wrist and spun us to face the crowd, shoulders pressed up against his bare abdomen, the back of our head barely meeting the muscular swell of his pectorals.

The heat of his bare skin slammed into us, and his aura teemed with violence and danger, wrapping around us like a blanket intent on strangling me.

I tried to bring myself back to the surface, but she took a page from Abaddon's book and held me down.

"Stay inside. Close your eyes. It will be over soon."

It was the first time she ever comforted me. For all the years I knew the demon spirit inside me, I never knew her as a coddler. What I did know was that she kept her promises. And she had promised to protect me.

So for once, I listened to her and receded into the deep recesses of my mind where Abaddon couldn't reach me while the stronger part of me took the brunt of the invasion I could barely feel.

Thanks to her.

As I sank into the darkness of my own psyche, I promised myself that one day I would kill Abaddon. I would draw it out so I could savor it.

"Scared of me now, My Queen?" the archdemon muttered into my ear between his lewd grunts.

Fucking monster.

That's what he was. But what he didn't realize was that no matter how much he hurt me, I would never be afraid of him. Because one day, I would prove to him that my beast was the one to be frightened of.



Even in the kind of life I lead, there are small mercies.

In the following weeks, my sister's pregnancy grew complicated. The king spared his most skillful healers and an oracle to aid in the pregnancy. Better yet, we were allowed to see out the pregnancy in our old home in the caverns beneath Devil's Head Mountain, and thankfully, Abaddon wanted no part in it.

I wasn't sure of my ability to stay strong for my sister if my new "mate" had insisted he accompany me.

I didn't want him to see the place I'd once called home. I didn't want him to have any other part of me from which he hadn't already forcibly claimed.

It's not like we were true mates. There was no mating bond between us. My beast did not resonate with his on any level. Therefore there was no thread connecting us. He left no mating mark, save for the gaping wound where my pride had once been.

When he'd let me go be with my sister to see to the birth, I had let myself believe that maybe he'd already grown bored of me. But that hope was quickly thrashed like wheat in the wind when he said, *"I'll give you three days with her. If you do not return after three days, I'll hunt you down."*

Then we parted on a kiss, which felt more like a brand.

I had every intention of making my escape once I was sure Nyx and her baby were safe. Abaddon had sent his healers and oracles with me, and I knew this was mostly as a way to keep an eye on me, but I was still grateful for their help. Without them, Nyx's chances of survival were slim.

As it turned out, she was carrying triplets.

According to the oracle, they weren't normal triplets either. Since their father had been an archdemon, Nyx had born three powerful infants with potential magical abilities. No normal woman would be able to withstand that. Thankfully, my sister wasn't an ordinary woman.

"She will survive," the oracle assured me for the dozenth time, his bronze-colored scales covered in bones, fur, and paint gleaming in the dim firelight that bathed the small cavern in gold. He had been kind to us.

I pressed a smile. "I hope you're not just saying that to keep me calm."

"I wouldn't lie to you, My Queen."

Nyx's screams filled the space, bouncing off the rock walls and sinking right to my bones.

My sister was all I had in this life. If I lost her, I'd have nothing except for my hate and my grief.

She was lying at the center of our cave on a stone slab that, judging by the dark bloodstains that

had seeped into the rock over the years, I was sure had been used for ancient, evil rituals over the eons. Most recently, however, it was covered in berry juice, since these days it served as our dining table.

Nyx was still in her demon form, at the behest of the healers. Her lavender scales were covered in a thin sheen of sweat, her legs spread and blocked out by the female healer crouched before her muttering prayers that were drowned out by my sister's ragged screeches of pain.

When they first began praying, I wondered why they cared at all for my sister's health. They were demons from the upper floors, so why would they care about a claimed demoness who'd been abandoned by her own mate?

So when I asked the oracle for who they prayed, the answer stunned me.

"The babies," he'd said.

At first, the news made me ill. *Triples*. How in hell were we supposed to feed three more mouths when we could barely feed ourselves? The Eighth Circle wasn't exactly teeming with game. Sometimes we had to hunt weaker demons to feed ourselves, and imp wasn't exactly the ideal diet plan for three infants. But the frets of a worried aunt temporarily turned to laughter, laughter of all things, when the oracle told me the babes were to be the new gods of this realm.

My sister was giving birth to gods. *Right*. I needed that laugh after the last few days I had. But as ridiculous as it was, the atmosphere was charged with something almost... magical. The air smelled of cinder, sweat, and electricity. As if a storm was brewing right in this very cavern.

I didn't believe for a second that my sister was about to give birth to gods. Archdemon or not, I had met Erebus. There was no way gods could come from that male's dick.

But even I could admit something strange was about to happen. I could feel it in my blood, my bones, the pounding of my heart and the quaking cries of my sister's labored, fatigued pleas to the surface god.

My fists clenched, skin stretching tight over my knuckles.

He wouldn't hear her down here. And even if he could, he wouldn't answer.

Miracles didn't happen in the Eighth Circle, but oh, the things I'd give for one right about now.

"Lil..." my sister's voice choked out, frayed from her screams. She held a hand out to me, and I grasped it, lacing my shaking fingers through hers. "I'm so sorry about what happened to you. Sorry I couldn't do anything to stop it."

I gave her a weak smile. It was just like Nyx to always put me first, even when she was about to push three screaming demons through her pelvis.

"I'm fine," I lied through a weak smile.

"You're lying," she whispered on a shudder of a breath.

"I *will* be fine," I began with a squeeze of her hand for assurance. "as long as you pull through this. Alright?"

"I'll pull through with all these upper layer healers fussing over me."

"Yeah, could you ever imagine we'd get this level of treatment?"

"No. Nor could I have ever imagined my own sister as queen."

My smile turned brittle. Any other woman in the realm would be happy to have such a title.

They were all ignorant idiots.

Abaddon didn't want a queen. He wanted a wild mare to beat into submission so all the realm could see his power and fear him. I couldn't imagine anyone actually choosing that kind of life for themselves.

"*He'd pick the wrong demon,*" my beast whispered low in my ear. "*We'll make sure of that.*"

She hadn't forgotten the promise I made to both of us that day in the magma planes. We held tightly onto it like the anchor it was.

But now wasn't the time to think about me and the pain I'd endured today. I had to focus and see my sister through hers.

The labor stretched on for what felt like hours.

The oracle began to mutter about gods and strands of realities, about wills that would stretch beyond chance. How a new age was upon us, that there would be a predetermined path for all creatures of the Underworld. The oracle called it fate. As the hours dragged on, I stopped listening to everything he was saying. He might as well be speaking in tongues for all the sense it made.

But when Nyx bore the first child, and the healers placed her in my arms first, something inside me shifted. It was just a babe, with lavender scales so pale they were almost translucent. It felt as though I were holding something profound, bigger than anything someone like me could even comprehend.

"Shouldn't she be crying?" I asked the oracle.

"She will not be like any child you've ever known," he answered.

"Will she open her eyes?"

"She needs a name first."

I looked to Nyx, who was already working on bearing the next child. "Clotho," she managed to grit between clenched teeth.

Just like magic, little Clotho's ghost-white eyelids fluttered open. A gasp tumbled from my lips as I found myself staring into the biggest eyes. They were completely black, as dark as death. At first, they were as void as the deepest crevice of the Ninth Circle, like being at the bottom of the frozen lake, cold and empty. My heart thrashed in my throat because these were not the eyes of a healthy, normal child. These were the eyes of something that could see past realities, into space and beyond. Eyes that stretched so deep for a moment, I thought I could see whole new realities even though my own reflection didn't show in them.

Then an image formed.

I'd never been there myself, but just looking at the scene, I knew by the formation of ice nestled between crags of mountains and snow-covered cliffs that I was looking at the frozen lake.

I could see the reflection of the Ninth Circle in my newborn niece's eyes.

A cold gust of air swept over my body, making my skin erupt in goosebumps. It was like the cave around me melted away, and for a moment, I was standing there in the deepest layer of hell, surrounded by a bone-deep cold that I couldn't have ever imagined in my wildest nightmares.

I was alone, swathed in darkness. Then, there was a flash of light that lit up the bleak, dark as ink sky. A streak of fire, a comet maybe, or a falling star, plummeting toward the ground, its tail of fire monetarily lighting up the darkness.

Then I realized it wasn't a comet or a star at all.

It was a man.

He plummeted toward the frozen lake and, with incredible force, smashed through the layer of thick ice. The sound was deafening. Shards of ice and thick torrents of water crashed onto the frozen bank.

I watched with a slack jaw as the dark water's surface stilled, and for a long moment, I thought the man might not emerge at all. After all, what could have survived that fall? Then, he erupted from the water's surface with a gasp of air. He flung his head back, gasping. His black hair clung to his brow, masking his eyes. The muscles of his sinewy form flexed beneath soaking skin, hot flesh against

ice-cold water, making steam rise from his sculpted body in wispy tendrils.

When his mouth opened in a silent scream, I remembered that I wasn't actually there, witnessing this. It was all so real, but this was just a vision.

Who was he? What was Clotho showing me?

The man's hand came up to sweep his hair back from his face, and that's when I saw his eyes. As hot as molten lava and as gold as a dragon's treasure. They seemed to be looking right through me as if he sensed I was staring at him from another time. Because I knew, without knowing who he was, Clotho was showing me something that had yet to pass.

The man was gorgeous. With soft skin the color of a demon's secondary form, but his was lightly sun-kissed. Wherever he'd come from, it wasn't Hell.

He clawed his way up onto the ice, and when he did so, I glimpsed the muscled planes of his back...streaked in red. Blood. Between his shoulder blades were two gaping wounds like long slashes down his back.

I'd seen wounds like that in the most grizzly of executions.

The poor man had had his wings torn from his being.

And that's when I knew exactly what this creature was.

He wasn't any demon. He wasn't a human soul. This fallen male was somewhere between the two, an immortal shifter that our kind had only heard tales of. A brethren race that lived far beyond even the surface, in a place only fabled to be reality.

He was a celestial, with an aura burning so bright he couldn't be any common born. He was powerful. He was royalty.

Perhaps, maybe, he was the salvation I'd been praying for to no god in particular.

It was a prayer Clotho, my newborn niece, had answered.

"What is it, Lilith?" my sister's voice came, pulling me back to the present. I swung my eyes away from the baby to my poor sister, who looked so exhausted, sprawled out on the stone slab.

Then I looked back to the baby in my arms who had started to cry, her tiny eyelids squeezed shut and her mouth wide open as she wailed. The vision was gone, but I still felt the weight of the celestial's eyes on me. A flutter of heat licked at the place between my thighs, despite the incredible pain that still throbbed from the last few days of Abaddon's brutal claiming.

And just like that, all the pain was gone, replaced only by the pleasant warmth the celestial invoked.

"Lilith, what is it you see?" Nyx called to me again.

I looked up at her, my vision swarming with the thick tears of relief that sprung in my eyes. "I think... I think I just saw a miracle."



Reality came slamming back into my gut like a wrecking ball. Or maybe it was just Miley Cyrus's 'Wrecking Ball' playing quietly on the elevator speaker that made the shift back to the present so incredibly jarring.

Or, maybe it was Abaddon's mouth on my neck, his feverish hot breath making my skin sweat as his ogre-sized hands helped themselves to handfuls of my breasts.

I steeled myself, allowing the beast to paw me as I tried to cobble my thoughts together.

Those memories were buried so deep inside me, I'd completely forgotten them. Most of them for good reason. But revisiting them had been necessary. Back then, I'd been stubborn about pushing those memories I shared with Abaddon to the darkest part of my being, hoping that they would just go away.

Abaddon had marred me, deeply. And even after all this time, those scars hadn't healed over.

I'd been stupid for never sharing the true extent of my trauma with Lucifer. If I had opened up to him completely, he would have never allowed the archdemon to play his way back into his good graces. But now, I could finally face the man who had hurt me. And make good on that promise I'd made to myself back then.

I almost felt liberated in a way.

I had a renewed sense of purpose, one that made Restless Jess—my beast—come alive. I had never seen eye to eye with the demon spirit inside me, but she had always done what she could to protect me against Abaddon as much as she'd been able. She'd fight him until she had no strength left and then draw me inside to where I could hide in the furthest recesses of my mind while she took the brunt of his abuse.

For the first time in probably ever, I was thankful for her.

The memories of the birth had been incredibly helpful for another reason.

Everyone knew who The Fates were, now that they were the closest thing to gods the Underworld had. Their will was just and all-knowing. And they were extremely private.

The last time I checked, they were still living in the caves in Devil's Head Mountain.

It was an inkling, but I suspected they were still there. I *hoped* they were still there.

Because *I* didn't have the power to kill Abaddon.

But *they* did.

The archdemon's breath grew short and heavy with lust. He was fully erect now, his cock straining against his trousers, barely keeping him in. My beast was tense, but she had no ability to shift and fight him.

This was all on me to get us out of this.

"This is the first time you've given it to me," he grunted in my ear, fingers digging hard enough into my flesh to leave bruises.

"W-what?"

"Your submission."

My blood ran cold, and I bit my lip to hold back a rattling growl from my beast. He would never have my submission. But survival meant pretending like he did. When I didn't protest, he glided his hand down my side to slip over my thigh and under the slit in my dress.

My heart slammed against my ribcage when his fingers slipped between my legs to stroke the place he once claimed was his. Lucifer had ripped my panties off back at the fountain. They probably still sat on the floor in a heap. Abaddon gave me a sickening grin, and I practically shriveled in on myself, my beast my only strength in this moment.

"Lure him to The Fates. Don't let him touch us here."

"Not here!" I pushed out.

Abaddon paused, then to my relief, his hand dropped from my sex. His eyes narrowed. "Where then?"

"The Eighth Circle," I ground out with a swallow. "My old home. I'd like to see my old home before it's over."

He chewed his lip in thought. Then shook his head. "No."

My heart dropped. "W-why not?"

I resisted the urge to recoil when he suddenly ripped the fabric of my dress to expose my thigh. I waited for his assault but found him pointing to a mark on my inner thigh. A mark that hadn't been there before.

My lungs seized when I saw a familiar crest seared into my flesh like an old scar that had been there for years.

Lucifer's sigil.

"W-what...?"

"Lucifer's mark," Abaddon muttered, the dark timbre of his tone making the hairs on the back of my neck dance.

"It wasn't there before." I couldn't take my eyes off it. Then again, it had been there, long ago. Now that I saw it on my flesh once more, I remembered. The mark of my true mate. I didn't know if physical marks were a thing with other shifters, but the devil marked his woman. The dark depravity of it was deeply erotic and comforting, even if it was a little primitive.

"Wasn't there before he claimed your cunt, your heart, and your soul."

Tearing my gaze away, I lifted my attention to Abaddon and gave him a nonchalant shrug. "So what? You're not telling me you're gonna let another male's mark keep you from having your fun?"

His lip curled with a sneer. "You stupid woman. He reclaimed you, meaning he can track you now. We leave this elevator, and he will hunt you down and take you before I can kill you myself. But that's what you want, isn't it?"

That wasn't exactly my plan. But Abaddon wasn't too far off. I definitely had no intention of sleeping with this fucker. "All I want is to stay alive as long as I can." At least that part wasn't a lie. "Take me to the caves beneath Devil's Head. It's a complicated network of tunnels in the mountain.

There are countless nooks and crannies to get lost in. It will be easy to lose my trail there. By the time he finds us, you would have already gotten your rocks off by strangling me and started your plot to try to take back the throne of Hell or whatever lame-ass plan you've slapped together."

A vein in the demon's jaw ticked. I kept going before he could decide against my plan.

"You pretend like you get off on rape, but you got pretty damn excited by my submission."

I pressed closer to him. I deserved a fucking Emmy Award for the sultry smile I managed to give him.

"Imagine how good I could make it for you by having me as a willing participant. Show me my home one last time, and I'll be *really* grateful."

It was a bunch of horseshit I was selling. For a few harrowing seconds that crawled by on their hands and knees, I thought he wouldn't buy it. But I had to swallow down a cry of joy when he jammed a meaty finger on the "8" button of the elevator panel.

He was so eager to have me beneath him as a willing participant that he was going to risk the wrath of the celestials and my mate. All to get his dick wet. I almost felt pity for the bastard. *Almost*.

He had been so scorned by Lucifer for stealing his queen and crown that he'd pretended to be loyal for centuries, all to lose everything he'd worked for right before hitting the finish line. All because of his fucked-up infatuation with me. He picked the wrong girl out of the crowd.

I just hoped and prayed that I was right and that The Fates were still living in the caves. If I was wrong, I'd be totally fucked.

Literally.



Most people were relieved to go back home after a long time away. But the Eighth Circle of Hell was never the type of home anyone could ever miss. Sure, I loved my sister, and there were moments here that I'd shared with her worth holding onto. But back then, living here had been nothing but survival. It was all a brutal game of the weak versus the strong. Prey versus predator. Seeing as I had lived for so long, I liked to consider myself one of the strong. *I* was a predator. I was the kind of predator that minded my own business, turning the males who thought they could turn me into their afternoon fuck and feast into my own prey.

I had been a grain of sand turned into a diamond by a blast furnace. The Eighth Circle had been my blast furnace.

This place had been an element in my forging, but it held no happy place in my heart. If I managed to pull off making this pit into Abaddon's final resting place, maybe then I'd smile when I thought of it.

When the elevator doors opened with a *ding*, I was shocked at what I saw.

The tips of the mountain range surrounding the magma planes could only just be seen over a giant structure smack in front of us.

"Is that a—"

"A shopping mall," Abaddon snarled as he thrust me from the elevator. "Your precious mate thought it would be 'funny' to desecrate the site where we were mated with some sort of casino for children.

I could barely hold back my shit-eating grin. Back when we first passed through my native circle, we hadn't changed anything about it. We'd hurried through as quickly as possible with a freshly defeated Abaddon hot on our tails.

But it looked like the new king had come back and added some much-needed touches.

Lucifer may not have known the extent of what happened on the day of my "coronation," but he'd known it had held a dark place in my heart and had made light of it as best he could by slapping a *Chuck-E-Cheese* over it.

"Let's move." The demon gripped my arm and wrenched me along after him. I yelped in pain, and he grinned back at me as I stumbled to catch myself. "I love how you scream for me, My Queen. The only reason I'm taking you to the caverns is that your cries are going to sound so sweet, echoing

throughout the whole mountain.”

A poisonous hatred settled at the bottom of my stomach like sediment in a stagnant lake. I looked at the mall, searching for any demons or souls who might catch sight of me. Would they even recognize me as their queen? I looked different than I had before, with short blonde hair instead of long and black. My shape was slightly different, too, now that Taco Bell was a part of my diet. But even if they did recognize me, what could they do? No one would have the balls to stand up to Abaddon.

“You’re going too slow,” the archdemon snarled, throwing me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

“Let me go!” I cried, slamming my fists into the steel-hard muscles of his back. “I can fucking walk.”

The demon’s only answer was a maleficent cackle delivered with a swift slap to my ass. I bit my tongue so hard that I tasted blood in my mouth for the second time today. It was dumb to think if I walked slow enough, Lucifer could catch up to us. Abaddon might have been stupid enough to take my bait, but he wasn’t about to drag his tail on getting to our destination. My mate would be hot on our trail, and with the mark on my thigh, I might as well have a tracking device installed beneath my skin.

A swoosh of wings sailed through my ears and swept through my mess of hair when the demon’s black wings fanned out. My nerves tumbled out of my mouth and slapped onto the ground as I realized we were going to fly to Devil’s Head.

Stealing a gulp of air, I squeezed my eyes shut as we were launched into the air. I always hated flying. Ironic for someone who used to have wings, but even my demon spirit never seemed to like it much.

I guess in the end, it ended up being my fate not to have wings or immortality. Maybe my nieces had always planned for me to be Jessica. Even though I held onto all the memories I shared with Lucifer from back then, it still almost felt like a different person’s memories. Maybe this was always who I was supposed to be.

Relief eased my taut muscles as the openings to the network of caves came into view, a series of openings in the large mountainside.

We landed in a cloud of dust, and when Abaddon released me, I stumbled toward the cave entrance, something close to nostalgia mixed with air-sickness making my chest tight and my head spin.

This had once been my home. My sanctuary. Not that it had ever been *safe*. Never that. The caves wound deep inside the mountains and were home to countless demons. My neighbors back then had closer relation to the creatures in *Alien* than the kind of people you saw on TV who you’d borrow a cup of sugar from.

But at least in the caves, there were fewer predators to fend off. Plus, my sister and I had known the tunnels better than anyone, so we’d purposefully made our home in the deepest cavern where we were never bothered, never found.

It would be the perfect hiding place for The Fates and a fitting crypt for Abaddon.

“Follow me,” I said to the demon, leading the way down into the darkness.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. It was damp, earthy, and smelled faintly of sulfur. My eyes adjusted to the darkness better than expected as I led us through the winding tunnels. There were distant sounds that bounced off the rock, echoing through the tunnels. A skittering of talons, the scrape of claws and gnashing of teeth, and the faint purring whine of a male calling to his mate.

My skin prickled as I felt Abaddon close on my heel, his eyes hot on my back. His heavy

breathing in my ear made my heart beat hard.

What if I was wrong? This whole shitty plan was about as stable as a bowel movement after risking five-day-old fast food leftovers. I was banking on the fact that my nieces had never left their childhood home. Which wasn't much of a plan. They'd last been here right before I died, but that had been a long time ago.

What were the chances they were still here?

And if they weren't here, I'd basically rolled out the red carpet for Abaddon and his monster cock by leading him to a place where it would be hard for Lucifer to follow my mark with all the tunnels and caves winding tightly together. If he brought Nyx with him, she'd probably guess my plan and take him to our old home, but something told me he'd leave her behind. Lucifer wouldn't want to take the chance of her getting hurt after the sacrifice I'd made to keep her safe and away from Abaddon.

My eyes fluttered shut for a second as I tried my best to get a grip on my crumbling nerves.

If this didn't go according to plan, I'd never see my friends Melanie or Gabriel ever again.

I wouldn't see my dad, wouldn't be able to enjoy all that extra time Lucifer had given him.

My whole body went cold, my heart crystalizing in my chest as I thought about Lucifer and how my chances were pretty thick that I wouldn't see him again.

I wouldn't feel the addicting sear of his greedy hands on my body, and the surprisingly gentle nature thinly veiled behind his every gesture, or the heat of his eyes as they drank me in like ambrosia.

I wouldn't be able to enjoy the delicious stretch of my body as he worked his way inside me while whispering devilish promises in my ear.

I wouldn't be able to savor his soul-stealing kisses ever again.

My eyes flung open when I felt rough hands on me, Abaddon's husky cackle touching me in places I gave him no license to touch.

"You're needy for me, you depraved little bitch. I can scent your need in the air. Do you get hot knowing this is going to be your last time? Knowing I'm about to tear you open on my cock?"

I battled the urge to flinch at his crass words. He was mistaking my desire for Lucifer as some kind of fucked up lust aimed in his direction. The narcissistic idiot.

"Let's keep moving." I swallowed, tempering my anger, letting it turn my skin to steel.

His tongue flicked out, wetting his lips. But he didn't move from my path. He pushed me against the tunnel wall, the damp rock painfully cutting into my back.

"Not here. We're almost there!"

The demon's dark laugh was his only answer. "I'm not a patient monster, My Queen. I've waited long enough. Besides..." He gripped my jaw, forcing my head up to look at him. "I know you're plotting something. I don't know what, but you're up to something."

Before I could open my mouth to deny it, a familiar voice spoke, slicing through the tension.

"M-my Lady?"

I jerked my attention to a gangly figure who'd appeared from a smaller tunnel that branched off from this one. He was wearing a back chef's uniform, with a wicker basket full of mushrooms slung on his arm, his hardnosed physiognomy wearing a bewildered expression.

It might as well have been Jesus himself who rounded the corner for all the relief that coursed through me.

"Cerberus!"



A thousand emotions bum-rushed me the second I laid eyes on my old friend.
Cerberus.

It seemed like too great a coincidence for the hound to be here. But by the basket in his arms, it was easy to guess his purposes in the tunnels of Devil's Head. He'd been collecting mushrooms for some meal or another. Whether it was just dumb luck or the will of The Fates, I was so damn glad to see the chef.

Once upon a time, the three-headed hound shifter had saved my life. Back then, he'd been the guard of the Third Circle. That was one of the most treacherous and, honestly, fucked-up places in all the nine layers. Who knows how long Lucifer and I had waded through the Mire of Gluttons where names for the floating corpses and souls of the gluttonous are forced to stew in their own filth for all eternity. When I'd twisted my ankle on a decaying body, Lucifer had carried me for days, maybe even weeks. He'd been ready to collapse when we came to Cerberus's hut in the middle of the mire, where Cerberus helped nurse me to health.

Tears swam in my vision, taking in the man with a renewed sense of love. Without him, I'd probably still be in that mire, wrapped in Lucifer's arms below the surface, forever encased in mud and decay.

In that hut, I'd learned that the hound-shifter was a kind and docile man. Because Abaddon couldn't use him as the terrifying hell beast, he punished him by sticking him in the middle of those wastes. Then Lucifer had saved him from that horrible existence, in thanks for saving us. It had been a long time ago, but I doubt the chef had forgotten his old life and probably trusted the archdemon as little as I did.

Cerb's bewildered expression took in the way Abaddon had me pinned against the rock, his gaze taking in the way the archdemon's claw held my jaw possessively, how my dress was torn at my thigh.

Cerberus may not know the exact depths of the archdemon's betrayal, but I could tell he was putting two and two together by the disgust etched in the creases of his face.

I thought for a second that Cerberus would play it off, pretend he didn't notice anything out of the ordinary and then sneak off to find Lucifer and guide him here. But by the rage on the chef's face, I knew he wasn't going to play that route.

Unease coiled through my whole body like my veins were threaded with barbed wire. He was going to get himself killed. While Abaddon's true form barely squeezed into the tunnel, Cerberus's true form was three times the demon's size. There was no way he could shift here.

"You bastard!" The basket dropped to the chef's feet and his fists balled at his sides. "How dare you put your claws on the king's mate!"

Abaddon's lips contorted into a vicious sneer as he spun to face the hound. "She was *my* mate. And *I* was her king!"

"Not anymore."

"Your loyalty to that celestial is cute, but his reign is over. Time to get back on my side, mutt. Otherwise, I'll rip off your balls and feed them to all three of your heads."

Cerberus was usually a jittery, twitchy man. It was supposed to be his nature to be intimidating and vicious, but it wasn't ever really something he cared for. Much to the displeasure of the old king and the pleasure of the new, he preferred baking cakes for his master rather than ripping off heads.

But right now, I was seeing a side of my old friend I'd never seen before.

The chef's eyes locked with mine, and somehow, I knew he was about to do something incredibly stupid. And incredibly brave.

"*Run!*" he mouthed. At least, I thought that's what he said. But there was no time to ask him to repeat himself because he suddenly lunged at Abaddon. The archdemon couldn't have been expecting the nervous chef to suddenly go on the attack because he hesitated. But the brief beat was all I needed to throw myself behind Cerberus, who shifted as he flung himself at my captor.

It was true that the tunnel would be too small for the hound to fight, but it was just big enough for the three-headed beast to block it off. He now was wedged into the small area, blockading the space and barring Abaddon from reaching me.

My heart lurched into my throat as my gaze fell to the basket of split mushrooms. Cerberus had launched himself into harm's way, protecting me with his mass while earning me time to run. But how much time had he bought me?

I stumbled down the winding tunnel, descending into the deepest bowels of the mountain. My heart rate began to climb, pounding hard in my ears as the sounds of snarling, growling, and the pained whimpers of the three-headed hound carried down to me.

Then there was silence.

A fist-sized lump swelled in my throat, making it hard to breathe.

Cerberus could be really hurt. He could be dead for all I knew. But if The Fates were no longer here, his sacrifice would have been for nothing.

Thank fuck for the torches lining the tunnels because there was no way I would be able to see without them. But they did nothing to chase away the chill. It may have been as hot as a sauna outside, but in here, it was freezing, probably because it was so close to the Ninth Circle.

Not that I was cold. Abaddon's hot, sickly sweaty breath still had me sweating bullets. I would give an arm and a leg for a damn shower so I could wash his stink off me.

All thoughts of getting myself clean were flung to the recesses of my mind when a guttural, bone-rattling roar made its way through the tunnel.

"Lilith!"

The thud of my heart slammed in my ears as I frantically stumbled into the deepest and largest cavern in Devil's Head.

Home. Or at least, it had once been. In another time, another life.

The place was mostly dark, lit only by the torches at the mouth of the cave. There was just enough

illumination to see that the place was completely empty save for some random bones scattered to the outer edges of the cave and the stone slab in the center.

Like that, any hope I had bottomed out of my stomach and fell onto the cold, damp floor at my feet. *They're not here.*

What in the fuck was I supposed to do now?

Another of Abaddon's hell-deep bellows tore through the tunnel—closer now.

My nieces had moved on, and wherever they were now, it wasn't here. No one would be saving me. It's not like I'd never been scared before. Ever since my father got cancer, I'd been scared out of my mind. But being frightened for myself wasn't something that had ever been a thing.

Until now.

Now I was scared out of my mind that I would never see my dad again.

I'd never see Mel or Gabe.

Cerberus probably lay dead in the tunnel outside. And Lucifer...

"Lucifer." I sobbed my mate's name, my fingers ghosting over his mark on my thigh.

Do whatever you have to, Kitten. Do whatever you have to stay alive until I get there.

It wasn't like he was actually talking to me. His telepathy ability didn't work like that. Still, I knew that's exactly what he'd be saying right now. Don't give up.

And my beast was basically slapping me from the inside, screaming at me to do something, anything. "*Fight,*" she urged. "*If not for our sake, for our mate's.*"

What was I supposed to do? I didn't have my clutch on me, and even if I did, what good would a cell phone and a few sticks of gum do against a freaking demon shifter with thighs the girth of my whole damn body?

If I knew my date was going to turn out like this, I would have brought a flipping battle ax or a flame thrower. Or—or—*a rock*. My gaze clamped down on a big-ass rock that was probably as big as Abaddon's head and maybe just small enough for me to lift.

So it might not kill him, but it would hurt like a mother.

Maybe it was just adrenaline, but I managed to haul the rock over my head, and I waited at the entrance of the cave, crouching behind a stalagmite big enough to conceal me.

Abaddon stomped in not a breath later, his murder-filled glower ripping apart the space in search of me.

"Don't hesitate. He'll find us any damn second," my beast advised. "*Now!*"



LUCIFER

As I followed Jessica's scent down to the Eighth Circle, to the caverns nestled below the great mountain, I couldn't help but wonder why'd she lead Abaddon here of all places.

Surely, she'd noticed the mark by now. She had to know I was tracking her, and leading me into a maze wouldn't help my chances of finding them any sooner.

I didn't think for a second that all this had been Abaddon's idea.

He would have known to take her to the top immediately so that he could hand her over to Michael.

But Jessica was smart. She would know that her chances of survival were slim as soon as she stepped out of that elevator onto the surface. She would do everything she could to stay alive, as she should.

I knew the caverns beneath Devil's Head Mountain once served as her and Nyx's home before she'd met Abaddon or me, and The Fates had once lived there too... Shit. She didn't still think they were there, did she?

They had made their way back to the archdemon's layer to be with their father. But Jess wouldn't know that. The existence of the Tenth Layer was something that had only become known to me after I'd lost her. If she expected them to help her, she was going to be sorely disappointed and very much in danger.

Blood and feathers! This was taking too damn long on foot.

If only Jessica had led him to the Third Circle, or the Fourth, where I would have taken the car and been on top of them in minutes.

"Find my mate. Fucking find her!"

My beast was going mad inside me.

Between the spirit's incessant growls in my ear and the sick fantasy of pulling Abaddon apart piece by piece playing in the back of my mind, I was going crazy. Jess's sunshine scent still clung to my nostrils, and it was the only thing driving me forward while my head went to a dark place fit for a devil's fantasies.

Oh, Jess. I could still feel the softness of her skin beneath my fingertips, how responsive she'd been to every lick of my tongue and stroke of my cock. The thought of it made me go rock hard, knowing that she now bore my mark on her thigh. I slipped back into darkness when I imagined the

possibility of Abaddon touching her, even now.

Even if I got to her in time, could I forgive myself for believing his act? After all, I had taken his crown and his mate. No matter how nonchalant he'd seemed about the whole thing a few hundred years afterward, I'd made him my bitch. I shouldn't have ever allowed the snake to earn my trust. Me of all people. I should have known better to guard such a thing.

My heart squeezed, pounding in my temple as I hurried along Lilith's trail and my stomach churned with disgust as I picked up on Abaddon's scent: wet pavement and steel. Scenting its metallic tang entwined with Jessica's soft, sunny scent made the spirit inside me blind with rage.

First, I'd rip off his legs, then his wings. Then I would carry them up top and have that Gabriel fellow deliver them to my brother at the pearly gates with a message that I'd be coming for *his* body parts next.

My family thought I was such a monster? Very well. I'd show them the kind of monster I could be.

Before I could sink too deep into a mire of my revenge, I registered a figure sprinting toward me from the direction of Devil's Head.

My heart lurched, seeing who it was.

"Cerberus!"

Something was wrong, horribly wrong. As my faithful friend came closer, I could make out the gruesome claw marks slashing his face. Blood wept from the deep cuts, soaking his chef's uniform.

"Sire! Oh, thank The Fates! Sire, you must come quick!"

"Cerb, what's happened to you?"

"I was hunting for mushrooms in the place I always do, Sire, when I found Abaddon nearly forcing himself on the queen!"

"You left her with him?"

"I fought him as best I could, which wasn't very good at all, I'm afraid. But it bought her some time. I tried to lure him away, but I thought it wise to flee before he could use the crown on me. She knows those tunnels better than anyone, Sire. With any luck, she's found a good hiding spot."

I shook my head, running my hands through my hair. "No, that's not like her. She won't cower, I'm afraid, even when she should."

"I'm afraid you might be right, My King. We must hurry. You can ride on my back until we get to the tunnels, My King."

I nodded, standing by as my chef stood back to shift. Like Lilith, he never really cared for his other form much. To him, his human body was his true form. So the fact that he was so willing to shift into the terrifying hell beast all to save his queen was exactly the kind of loyalty I needed.

In a blink, standing in front of me was the wiry, mousy man and the next second was a three-headed hound the size of a bus.

In this form, he truly was the terrifying beast of legend, at least cosmetically. While Abaddon had been disappointed to discover the shifter's docile nature when he'd taken up the crown, I'd been delighted. I'd much rather have unlimited cake than a hound to do all my intimidating for me when I was perfectly capable of that myself.

He knelt down onto the ground so that I could climb onto his back and grabbed two fistfuls of his coarse, brown fur.

"Let's go get our queen, old friend."



My muscles screamed as I used every shred of my strength to bash the rock against the demon's skull.

My lungs emptied on a gasp when it barely staggered him.

"But it knocked off the crown."

I flung myself at the crown the second it clattered to the floor, scattering myself across the stone. I fumbled with it, not knowing quite what to do with it other than jam it on my head as the archdemon thundered toward me with his serrated teeth bared and his claws outstretched.

He was fucking terrifying.

"Stop!" I cried, launching to my feet in a panic.

There was a pulse of magic that even I could feel in my human form, rushing over my body like static shock. Then to my complete bewilderment, he froze in his tracks. I blinked rapidly, confused as to what was going on.

I wasn't the only one completely lost. Abaddon wore the thunder-struck expression of a man who'd just been bested. His blue eyes flicked up to the crown on my head, and his brow slashed with rage.

"Take that off!"

Holy Mother of Christ. The power of the crown had worked. That didn't make any damn sense. Even when Lucifer wore the crown, the power didn't work on archdemons. And the king before him.

So why was *I* able to command a powerful demon like Abaddon when I wore it?

My creature purred with giddy satisfaction. *"Well, well. This is a pleasant surprise."*

"Take it off!" he roared again, his command so loud it shook the dust from the cavern's ceiling and sent it raining down on us like ash.

I could stop and ask questions as to why the crown's power was stronger when I wore it or why it even worked at all for me later.

This was a freaking miracle. The Fates may not have been here like I planned, but this was even better. Whether it was by their influence or just sheer dumb luck, I'd been handed the best possible outcome. The ability to murder Abaddon myself and make him pay for all that he'd done.

"Lilith!"

"It's Jessica now, not Lilith. And keep my damn name out of your mouth, monster. Now get on

your fucking knees.”

Tension pulled my stomach tight when his muscles bulged. He was growing bigger, trying to fight my power. The sound of shredding fabric filled the air, and he grew too large for the clothing that already strained to fit him. His eyes were practically popping out of his head, and the tendons in his neck pulled tight as he used every bit of his strength to fight against the crown’s will.

Then, relief burst through me when he collapsed to his knees, making the earth below quake.

My beast was alive with wicked amusement, and I was right there along with her.

This was going to be good.

“You think you’ve won?” he seethed through teeth clenched so tight I could practically hear them cracking. “Just because you wear the crown you think you can beat me?”

“Actually, that’s exactly what I think, asshole. Now, where should we begin?”

I rubbed my chin with thought, milking this for everything it was worth. I loved the way I could see the twinkle of fear beneath Abaddon’s cracking, tough-guy facade. “Oh, I know. First, tell me what happened to Cerberus. Did you kill him?”

The demon barked a cruel laugh. “You think it works like that? You can’t force me to tell you shit. The crown’s power doesn’t work like that.”

“No. It doesn’t.” My mouth slowly curled into a maniacal grin. “But it does work like this. Reach back and grab your right wing.”

Maybe I was a little fucked up for just how much joy I got seeing the look of horror flash across his face. But I wasn’t about to stand here and contemplate my moral compass. This was too much damn fun.

“Rip it off, nice and slow, ‘My King.’”

Just as he screamed a frayed “no,” his arm did as I commanded and slowly began ripping at the appendage. The sound was absolutely disgusting. Tearing flesh and cracking bone sent a shiver down my spine, but I centered my focus on the pain in his face as he removed the source of all immortal shifter’s pride and joy.

“What’s the matter, big guy?” I snickered. “I’m in love with Lucifer. So if this was really an attempt to steal me away from him, shouldn’t you endeavor to be more like him?”

The blood-curdling scream welded with a savage growl that made my ears want to curl in on themselves. But I stood my ground, every nerve in my body tingly and warm like they were threaded with Christmas lights.

Blood pooled around his knees, reflecting the pretty scene of him looking up at me, wearing the crown with a sickening grin on my face.

Lucifer would be so proud. Part of me wanted to wait for my mate to get here before I continued. However, patience was never really my strong suit.

“Very good. Now remove the other one.”

“No!” he gritted out, every tendon in his clenched jaw spasming as he fought me with everything he had.

“No?” I made a scoffing sound. “I’m sorry, but between us, that word has no damn meaning. Isn’t that right? Now rip off the other one, and don’t keep me waiting.”

Despite his best efforts to resist the power of the crown, he ripped off the other.

I relished the way he screamed in agony, savored the way his nostrils flared and how his chest heaved with labored breaths. He was trying to hold in all the pain, trying not to let me see just how much I was hurting him.

Doesn’t feel so good on the receiving end, does it?

“You think this is over? You can kill me now, but the celestials are coming for you. They’ll murder you again, and this time they’ll kill Lucifer too. When you reincarnate again, you’ll always carry that empty feeling of not having your mate. And the worst part will be you won’t know why. We’ve ruined you for all men, all happiness. You’ll die alone, over and over again until the end of time.”

“*Make him rip off his cock,*” my beast purred in my ear.

I rolled my eyes. “Maybe. But at least I’ll be alive. More than what we can say about you in the next few minutes. And if Lucifer does die, at least *he’ll* have his cock attached when he goes.”

All the color drained from Abaddon’s face. “What?”

“Grab your cock, big guy.”

“No!” But even as he screamed the word, his sausage-thick fingers wrapped around the member that was already punching out of his torn pants. Somehow he was still erect.

“Jeez, you really are a fucked up son of a bitch.”

“Please...”

“Please? Wow. Who knew that flesh between your legs would inspire such manners. Now, before you give it its last tug, let’s have a moment of honor for all the women you’ve probably assaulted with that thing.”

The look in his eye made me stop. “What?”

“There aren’t any other women.”

“Oh, please. I believe that Lucifer, my true mate stayed abstinent for me over all these years, but there is no damn way I’m going to believe you’ve never stuck your cock in a woman, willing or otherwise, since me. Not when you’ve been surrounded by Lucifer’s seedy business ventures.”

He jerked his chin, his cool blue eyes blazing with something that struck me deep. “You don’t have to fucking believe me. Just know this. From the moment I laid eyes on you that day on the magma plains, you’ve invaded my brain, my heart, my damn dick. Ever since you fought, I’ve been obsessed with the fire that burns inside you. I haven’t been able to get hard for anything else but that.”

“You never loved me, so don’t try to imply that you do. All you care about is causing me and the demon spirit inside me pain. You get off on hurting us.”

“Maybe. All so I can see those flames inside burn brighter, and from those ashes rise something brilliant. You may be a nurse now, but never forget you’ll always be *my* mate.”

I swallowed hard, looking down my nose at the monster with pity. “You’re wrong. I am Lucifer’s mate. All I was before him was your victim. And I’m not a nurse anymore. I am Jessica Sims, the Reborn Queen of the Fucking Underworld.”

I held out my hand to him with an expectant look on my face. “Now, shift back to your human form because it’s going to hurt more without your beast to protect you.”

He did as he was told. His gray skin faded away to the peachy color of his secondary form. His bulging frame shrunk down from titan-shaped to WWE wrestler size. He was still huge, but this form was small compared to his other one. His black hair, long on top and shaved at the sides, showed off all the tattoos on his skull that didn’t seem so intimidating now. And the cock he gripped was quite a bit smaller than it had been.

Perfect.

This jerk didn’t deserve to die with a big dick.

I held my hand out palm up, with an expectant look on my face. “Good boy. Now rip off your cock and give it to me. I’m going to have it mounted so I can always remember this moment.”

The next few seconds were like something out of an uncut, straight to DVD horror movie.

Abaddon's face contorted with agony and his whole body began to tremble as he pulled on his dick. My stomach clenched as the sound of tearing tissue filled the cavern. Blood spurted out between his fingers in thick, crimson petals, and his entire body was drained of all other colors when he held the flaccid piece of flesh out to me.

It was completely disgusting but oddly poetic in a satisfying sort of way. The justice of it all.

I smiled down at the savaged appendage and gave it a little waggle.

"On second thought, it's too small for my wall. Open your mouth. This one is my beast's idea, so the credit for the creativity has to go to her."

The demon's eyes went wide with fear, but he had no choice. He had to obey. When his maw opened, I stuffed his shredded dick into his mouth and stood back, admiring my handy work.

Yup, this was definitely next-level messed up. But the fucker had it coming to him.

"Now, what should be the final touch? Oh! I know. You supposedly love me, right? How about you give me your heart? You've offered me others plenty of times. But only yours will do, Abaddon. Give me your heart, and we'll call ourselves even, shall we?"

There was a sort of look that came over the demon that filled me with an immense amount of delight. I no longer felt any kind of pity for the monster. Only wicked glee that I had fulfilled my promise after so long.

His hand thrust through his chest, the squelch of organs making all my insides queasy as he dug around for his heart and held it out to me with a shaky arm.

I tilted my head, clenching his still throbbing heart in my fist as my lips spread into a devilish grin. "Afraid of me now?" I asked him, repeating the words he'd muttered in my ear when he'd raped me in front of thousands.

His mouth hung open, a soundless groan of a man on his last breath. Then he managed to whisper something that even I didn't expect.

"Fucking...beautiful..." Then he keeled over, face down in his own blood.

Poetic indeed.



LUCIFER



It had been a long time since I'd paid the caverns below Devil's Head a visit. When Lilith and I had passed through here on our journey up through the layers, she'd taken me here to introduce me to the closest thing to gods this realm had.

After Lilith's death, I made the occasional visit with Nyx and The Fates. They were the ones who'd informed me that my mate had been reincarnated. At first, they'd been helpful with my search for her, but less so over the years. Not that I blamed them. They were enigmatic creatures. Once they'd moved down to the Tenth Circle to be with their father, there was no reason to come here now.

Without them, the place was even colder. Probably a lot more dangerous too, now that the realm's most powerful entities no longer called this place home. Which only made me move faster down the tunnels with Cerb tailing behind me. It was too narrow in here for him to hold his beast form, and he'd turned back to human. With his chef's uniform destroyed in his shift, I'd lent him my suit jacket to tie around his waist.

"Sire, I'm embarrassed to let the queen see me like this!" He ran a nervous hand through his hair, his whole body pink with embarrassment as his other tugged the blazer down in the front to cover himself.

"We have bigger things to worry about than the queen seeing your johnson, Cerb."

"Yes, of course. My apologies, My King—"

He never finished his sentence. We both sensed it at the same time. A powerful magic filled the tunnel, smothering the air.

"That's the crown's energy," I muttered beneath my breath, dread making my throat swell.

Abaddon must have used the crown on Jessica. But that didn't make any damn sense. As half archdemon, she should have been immune to its influence.

When we arrived at the mouth of the cave, the stench of blood and sweat wafting out of it was so strong, nausea took root in my stomach like putrid weed. Not because I was any stranger to gore, but because I knew my mate was in there, and I knew exactly what Abaddon intended to do with her to make her pay for her betrayal.

What if I'm too late?

The last thousand years I'd spent searching for her would have been worth it for our one weekend together. But we deserved so much more than that.

I wanted her for all eternity and beyond.

I stepped into the cave, my pulse thrashing in my ear. All my fear for Jessica's well-being fell right out of my damn asshole when my gaze dropped to Abaddon, dead on the ground in a pool of his own blood, his wings torn off and his own cock stuffed in his mouth.

"Holy. Fucking. Christ." Cerberus muttered behind me.

Cerb never swore, but the scene before us was enough to make a nun curse. Because holy fucking Christ indeed.

There was no time to dance for joy at the harrowing death Abaddon had clearly suffered. Because my gaze next found a sight even more glorious for words.

My mate and queen stood over Abaddon, splattered in his blood, the crown atop her head, sitting so perfectly like it had been made for her. Her face was drained of all color, her red dress torn, showing off her blood-spattered thighs.

Her blonde hair was tangled, and her face streaked with tears. But bleeding almighty, did she look beautiful. Soft and fair, but wild and dangerous all at the same time.

"Lucifer," she squeaked, her gray eyes welling with fresh tears.

She threw herself into my arms and buried her head in my chest. I stroked her hair, relishing the warmth that bloomed in my chest from having her safe and sound in my arms.

"Tell me what happened."

"I thought my nieces would be here. I thought they could help me kill him. Cerberus was in the tunnels picking mushrooms, and he threw himself between Abaddon and me. I ran here." Her throat bobbed with a swallow. "They were gone. So I knocked the crown off his head with a rock and put it on. I wasn't even thinking."

I blinked at her, then down at the dead demon at our feet. "The power of the crown isn't supposed to have an influence over archdemons. It never has before."

"I don't know why it worked. But it did."

I took in the grisly remains of Abaddon. Part of me wished I'd been the one to end him. But if anyone deserved to end his life, it was Jessica. By the look of the bastard, she hadn't made it quick.

And it hadn't been pretty.

She made him pull apart his own body, piece by piece.

"You ended it by having him tear off his own cock and stuff it in his mouth? That's so disturbing it's hot."

She let out a small giggle and held her hand out to me. "Actually, the finale was this. Thought you might want a souvenir since you couldn't be here for the show."

In the palm of her hand sat Abaddon's heart.

If I wasn't the devil himself, I'd likely seek therapy for the way my shaft was straining in my pants.

She gave me the most glorious smile that made her tear-glazed eyes light up. Then they slid from me to Cerberus. He was standing by the door, looking awkward as he wrung the sleeve of my blazer in his hands.

"Cerb..." Stepping over to him, she planted a kiss on his cheek that renewed his full-body blush. "Thank you for what you did. I'd be dead right now if it wasn't for you."

"You're welcome, My Queen. I'd do anything for you, really, truly!"

She shuddered with a tight laugh. "I believe that, so let's start by just having you call me Jess."

He gave her a soft smile. "You always insisted I call you by your first name back then too."

"Actually, I remember that now."

“I’m so happy your memories have returned, My Que—Lil—I mean Jess!”

She laughed again. She may have looked different now, with a new name, new memories that I had no part in. But her laugh was the same. Sunny and bright. The Underworld had no need of a sun with her as queen. She was all the light we needed.

I dropped my gaze to Abaddon’s corpse, my mouth tugging up into a grin at the sight.

And she could burn a fucker with her flames if anyone dared fly too close.

Striding over to them, I handed chef the heart and slipped him a smooth grin. “Here. Put this in a soup for me if you would, Cerb. You know what to do. Now, if you don’t mind waiting outside the cave, I’d like a moment alone with our queen. We’ll be out in just a few minutes.”

As soon as he left, I turned to Jessica, who let out an adorable little sound that was somewhere between half gasp, half gag. “You’re going to *eat* Abaddon’s heart?”

My smile turned wicked. “No, but Cerberus is going to tell people I am. I have an image to maintain.”

She pushed herself back into my arms and angled her head up at me, the smile on her face so tempting I burned to taste the flavor of it. Arching down, I pressed my lips to hers, relishing the way she moaned against me. Her arms snaked around my shoulders, and her fingers dug into my hair. My tongue pushed in her mouth, running over her teeth, swirling over her own tongue.

“I thought I lost you again,” I admitted against her, my voice low and laced with memories of days long past but not forgotten.

She stilled in my arms, pulling back to study my gaze. “I’m here. You still have me. Last time might not have panned out in our favor, but this time around, no one is going to rip us away.” She nudged Abaddon’s body with her foot. “Look what happens to those stupid enough to stand in our way.”

“Well, he’s only the least of our worries, I’m afraid. My brother will have better tricks planned. It will take more than a flash of your thigh and a rock to the skull to end him.”

“We’ll figure out what to do with Michael later. But I think we should send him Abaddon’s head as a little message.”

My cock twitched against my thigh, and I groaned. “Gods below, Kitten. You’re so damn hot, I’m half tempted to take you right here and now.”

My beast purred with hunger, seeing the way the apples of her cheeks burned red—our favorite color on her. “But I’m filthy.”

“I say all the better.” She was fury and fire and beauty incarnate, wrapped up in a soft, blonde package that made my cock ache with need. I would have her any way I could if she’d have me. I was a depraved son of a bitch, after all. But I made note of the way she held herself, how her legs were shaking under her weight. Her eyelids were half-mast, heavy with exhaustion, her flaxen trusses crusted in blood. And that dress on her body was hardly more than mere scraps, struggling to cover its mistress.

“Let’s get you back to Lust first, Kitten.” I scooped her up in my arms, and she curled up into me, her eyes closing.

“We’ll have to come up with a plan on how to handle Michael.”

“We’ll discuss my brother soon enough. Before you fill your head with him, I want to fill the rest of you with me. After a good bath and a full night’s sleep.”



Lust was paradise compared to the hot, arid atmosphere of the Eighth Circle. For one, there was air conditioning.

The big hotel was like something you'd find on the Vegas strip, complete with a casino and all sorts of other attractions. Lucifer had already shown me most of the building, but now that my memories had mostly returned, it had a different impact. A lot had changed since we'd built this place together, eons ago. But despite its new fancy chandeliers, marble flooring, and modern art, it still felt like home.

Lucifer carried me through the lobby, with a million people trailing behind us, eager to look at me. It must have been common knowledge now who I was, or at least that I'd gotten my memories back, because everyone was eager to greet me. All their faces were a blur, though. I was so tired I could barely keep my eyes open. Nyx's was the only face I registered. She hurried along beside Lucifer, fussing over me, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I'll let you be alone with the king tonight, but I'll come to your room first thing in the morning with breakfast, and we can catch up. Alright?"

I managed a weak nod. I felt her cool lips press a soft kiss to my forehead then I must have nodded off for a few minutes because the next thing I felt was myself slipping into a hot bubbly bath. I moaned as the hot water enveloped my aching muscles.

"Is the water warm enough?"

"It's perfection."

"Good." My mate let out a pleased purr, the sound making my eyes flit open. My whole body heated, a delicious warmth pooling in my belly that had nothing to do with the bathwater when I saw him on his knees beside the bathtub, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows with a loofah and a bottle of soap in hand.

He was going to wash me himself.

My mouth went dry as I watched him squirt out the soap onto the loofah, sweep my hair off my back, and set it over my bare shoulders.

I don't know why I was nervous. He'd already had me back on the Seventh Floor when I finally realized who I was. I'd been so overwhelmed with emotion then, but establishing the mating bond had felt urgent. It was like my beast had been desperate to fill that hole—no pun intended—that had felt so

empty ever since I could remember. Now with Abaddon dead and gone and no deep-seated internal instincts in the driver seat, things felt....different.

This felt more intimate, and part of me still felt like I was stepping into a stranger's shoes. Even though I knew I was Lilith, I wasn't the same as I'd been back then. And Lucifer wasn't the same either. We had so much catching up to do.

Gleaning my thoughts, Lucifer's fingers curved over my shoulders, the touch soft and reverent. "We have all the time in the world, Jessica. There is no need to rush things."

His words, combined with the smooth, massaging pattern his fingers were making on my shoulders, eased the tension in them some. But part of me couldn't help but wonder how true it was. Abaddon might be dead, but we still had the celestials to worry about. Gabriel was one of them, I knew that. But I doubted he held so much clout with Michael to go so as far as to change the archangel's mind about his own brother. And before that, I'd have to change Gabe's mind about Lucifer.

Eager to divert my mind, I turned my attention to the bathroom's immaculate details. It was complete with marble and steel finishes that would look right as home in a multimillion-dollar mansion. "Where are we? This can't be one of the hotel's rooms. It's too fancy."

"It was the first room with occupants." He sat back on his heels, a warm and reminiscent look banked in the depths of his amber orbs. "Of course, it didn't look anything like this when you were here last."

I sat up in the water, swiveling my head around. "You mean...?"

"This was our room when we lived in Lust for the handful of years we had, yes."

My throat tightened with emotion as I took in all the details more closely. But I recognized none of them. This room was completely modern. Decorative hand towels, high-end fixtures, and even indoor plumbing hadn't existed back then.

As if reading my mind, Lucifer's hand slipped into the water to stroke my knee. "A lot has changed since you've been gone. I would have kept this room exactly as it was when we'd shared it, but—"

"That's okay," I assured him with a lazy smile, leaning my head back against his shoulder. "If you'd kept it the same, it would have collapsed in on itself by now. I'm still not sure why you trusted me with nails and a hammer."

"I'd trust you with anything, Jessica." The tenderness in his voice was disarming.

I squirmed in the water, heat rising to my cheeks and sinking down between my thighs as his hands returned to my body, working the grime of the day off my skin in gentle, circular motions.

"Anyway..." I swallowed hard. "I'm glad you changed it. It hurts to think about you living in the past, trying to hold onto me after I'd gone. It doesn't seem fair that for the time that I was living that I didn't remember what exactly was missing from my life. After being reunited, when Abaddon took me away, being away from you was pure torture." It was like I had left behind half my heart. "I can't imagine you going through that for several centuries."

His fingers trailed over my hip, his knuckles grazing my side and making me jump at their tickle. He chuckled as he reached for a bottle on the side of the bathtub and squeezed some shampoo into my hair to begin messaging it into my scalp. "I did sulk for a long time back then. I didn't want to change anything at first. But your sister wouldn't let me wallow for too long. I owe a great deal to her."

My heart squeezed at the mention of Nyx. I'd lost so many years with my twin. It would be impossible to go back to the way things had been between us. Back then, she was as comfortable and as needed as my own left arm. Back then, I had needed her for survival. Now, life was easier for both

of us. This was a new beginning, and I hoped we'd find a new normal, together.

"Did Erebus ever come back?"

Lucifer's fingers went rigid on my scalp for a beat. He let out a sharp sigh and continued working the shampoo into my hair. "He never came back, no. When the triplets learned of his location, they went to be with him."

I turned around to look at him, blinking through my fringe of blonde lashes. He looked pained, tired even. Like another big explanation was on the horizon. "Where?"

"The Tenth Circle."

I stared at him for a long breath, probing to see if those words struck any meaning with me. "I don't remember that place."

"Because you didn't know about it before you died. None of us did. The triplets discovered that there's one more layer beneath the Ninth. The way is treacherous, and only those born from it can find the way."

I twisted him around to pin him with an "a-ha" look. "That's where archdemons must come from!"

His lips quirked with the ghost of a smile. "How did you know?"

"I remember always thinking about what kind of place could spawn shifters like Erebus and Abaddon. They had to come from somewhere. If each layer is generally more treacherous than the ones before it, the Tenth Circle must be true hell."

"This is all true hell."

Letting out a chuckle, I gestured to the bathroom. "A luxurious hotel, the best bath of my life, getting pampered by the king himself. If everyone knew what Hell was truly like, there would be a whole lot more sinning up top."

"It was the Hell that people imagined it to be before we got our hands on it." I could hear the smile in his voice.

"So have you been to the Tenth Circle then? To try to tame it?"

"No. Haven't had a reason to. Human souls don't dwell there, and the archdemons seem happy to leave it the way it is. Though I almost made the journey with Nyx once, when she went to see The Fates. I missed their aid in the hunt for you. But you remember how they were. Always so cryptic with their help even when they had all the answers."

I wrinkled my nose in confusion. "Wait. Nyx has gone?"

"She was gone for a decade. The way was treacherous, and she almost didn't make it back."

"But I thought you said only those who originated from that plane could find the way."

"That's the thing I'm getting at, my love. She *is* from that realm. At least originally. She's half archdemon, as are you. We figured out your mother was born in the Tenth Circle. Like Erebus, she traveled to the Eighth Circle to find her true mate. But unlike Erebus, she never went back home."

I never knew my mother. She had died giving birth to Nyx and me. I wonder if she would have gone back home like Erebus after she'd delivered us. "What does this mean?"

"I'm not quite sure. Though I think it's the explanation for why you were able to command Abaddon when you wore the crown. Archdemons are stronger than regular demon shifters and are often stronger than their own kind in odd ways. Abaddon may have been superior to you physically, but you've always been more cunning, and kinder. The crown has a bit of its own will, you know. It probably thought you a far better master than Abaddon. In fact, you probably share common ground with it."

"What do you mean? What do I have in common with a crown?"

"You've both been worn by Abaddon, and neither of you was very willing to repeat that. So you

joined forces.”

“And is that why you can only sort of read my mind? You can’t reach archdemon’s minds. But my beast is only half archdemon. Which explains why only some of my thoughts make it through to you. And why thoughts like the horrible ones concerning Abaddon did not.”

Lucifer gave a nod.

Silence wrapped around us for several minutes as I stewed in this latest information. On top of all the other craziness that had happened to me the last couple of days, this was the easiest to swallow.

I closed my eyes, sinking into the feel of Lucifer’s hands on my body as he bathed me. I let myself sink deep into my thoughts, contemplating all the mysteries the Tenth Circle held. Maybe I’d go someday to see my nieces and give Erebus a piece of my mind for abandoning my sister.

When Lucifer’s hands stiffened, I opened an eye and peeked up at him. “Are you in my head?”

He scowled. “A thought I didn’t care for much slipped through.”

“Well, if you’re going to be nosey—”

“I don’t want you going to the Tenth Circle, Jessica. It’s too dangerous.”

“You let Nyx go.”

“I let Nyx go because who am I to keep a mother from her children? Besides, Nyx is still in possession of her wings. She is more durable than you. If you want to go because of The Fates, I promise your nieces can still help in our fight against the celestials with them right where they are.”

“So, what are we going to do then?”

“I told you, that’s a conversation for later. I want you to rest.”

Finished with washing my hair, he moved down to clean my chest. His touch was void of hunger, demanding nothing as he ran the loofah over my nipples and down to my navel.

Slipping my hand over the back of his neck, I pressed down to guide his lips down to mine as I arched my hips to where his hand held the loofah. “I don’t want to rest.”

“Kitten... You should sleep.” He tried to admonish me with that honied purr of his, but it only made me want him all the more.

“We’ll sleep when we’re dead,” I whispered through a sultry grin before pressing up, silencing the rest of his protests with a kiss.

My beast let out an erotic sound, and by his body’s response, I wondered if his own spirit had heard it.

He groaned against me, catching my bottom lip between his teeth. His hand released the loofah and slipped between my thighs, stroking his mark. “You know I can’t resist you when you kiss me like that.”

“Good, because we have a fuck-ton of time to make up for.”

His perfect lips curved into a smile against my own. “A ‘fuck-ton’ is right.”



My lips parted on a sigh as Lucifer's index finger traced the crest marking my flesh. "I just love touching you here," he rasped. "Your reaction when I touch it is the most erotic thing I've ever seen. And I own a strip club filled with succubi." His tongue wetted his lower lip as his wolfish grin turned diabolical. He brought his mouth to my ear and caught the soft lobe of skin between his teeth, pulling it gently. His silken chuckle, laced with mischief, made my skin prickle with its feather-soft kiss.

His hands cupped the interior of my thighs and gently pushed them apart, spreading me wide. The warm water rushed inside me, tickling the place that was now aching to be touched.

"The scent of your arousal is so damn strong whenever I catch you thinking about my mark on your flesh." He tilted his head, his ink-black hair spilling over his eyes. His smirk was arrogant and charming all at once. "You like knowing you belong to me, don't you? And the fact that other males can scent me on your flesh turns you on."

Heat pooled in the devil's smoldering gaze, and for a long second, I was completely lost in it, drowning in the amber depths of his eyes.

He lifted one hand from the water to stroke my cheek, my flesh burning under his touch. "The way your body responds to me is so damn beautiful, Jessica. Especially when I do this..."

His finger that had traced his mark lifted from the crest and found my clit, thumbing it like it belonged there this whole time.

I melted against his touch, moaning his name.

"God's blood, woman. How I relish the way you utter my name like it's the only prayer you know when all others utter it only to spread fear and hatred. You're my salvation, Jessica. I will always worship you as long as you let me."

I spread my legs wider and wiggled my hips, pressing up into his hand. "Go on then. Worship me."

His chuckle was all gravel, wrapped in silk. "Not in the way you're wanting, Kitten. Not just yet. You need rest."

Pulling me to my feet, he wrapped a huge fluffy towel around me and scooped me up into his arms. As he carried me from the bathroom into the bedroom, I couldn't help but gasp.

The bedroom was ginormous, but to call it a bedroom seemed like a stretch. It was bigger than

mine and my dad's duplex back in Seattle. In the center of the room sat a four-poster bed with a sheer white canopy fixed to the ceiling and draping around the bed.

"When you think of Hell, this isn't really the sort of accommodations you picture."

"It was the sort of thing we pictured back in the day. A perfect paradise for all the souls who should have made it to the Silver City but didn't because of some stupid reason or another."

"It's perfect," I murmured. He sat me on the edge of the bed, then went to the large white dresser and came back with a silk nightgown. Unraveling me from the towel, he tugged the nightgown over my head and eased me into the soft white bed that felt like damn heaven against my aching muscles.

He stripped down to his boxers and climbed into bed, the mattress dipping with his weight as he settled beside me, pulling me into the hard muscles of his body. "It's perfect now that you're here."

I twisted around in his arms to come face to face with him, resting my head on his shoulder. "Can you hear my beast in my thoughts?"

His brows twitched like my question caught him unguarded. Then his eyes softened. "Sometimes."

"Do you like her?"

"Like her?" He chuckled, but the amusement fizzled in his eyes when his attention centered on my frown.

"I'm being serious. What do you think of Reckless?"

"I think it's cute you've named her."

"Don't you have a name for yours?"

His brows knitted together through the dark. "Why would I when we're essentially the same being? If I still had my wings, allowing him to shift to his form, it's still mostly me. I'm still in control, with my thoughts being the most dominant."

"Sometimes, she feels like a whole different person. She argues with me."

"She's the spirit of Lilith's demon inside you. Your body may be Jessica Sims, but you are connected to Lilith through the same spirit you both housed. It's normal to argue with your beast. She's your demonic instincts warring with your humanity. And to answer your question, I love her very much. She's the mate to my beast, and she's the part of you that connects you to Lilith."

"So...*she's* your mate then, and I'm just here because you guys need my vagina?"

It was halfway meant as a joke but hearing how the words stung as they left me, I realized they carried more weight than that. "Sorry. I might have been feeling a little bitter like I was the third wheel here."

Lucifer propped himself on his elbow, his eyes blazing through the cover of night. "*No*. You aren't the third wheel, Jessica. As I said, I believe my beast and I are the same entity, and that goes for you and yours. I love you as I love her because to me, you are one and the same. Don't you feel one with her?"

I worried my lip, turning my attention to stare up at the canopy suspended overhead. "I acknowledge who I was before. That's a huge freaking step in such a short amount of time. You gotta understand that I literally woke up two days ago not even believing in the devil. And the most significant romantic connection I'd even had with a man was one time where a one-night stand turned into a two-night stand. And that was just because the guy had a margarita machine and the DVD collection set of the extended edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. Now here I am, Queen of the Underworld, with a several thousand-year relationship under my belt and a rapey ex who I murdered. With *magic*. I'm making leaps and bounds here."

His eyes glittered as they assessed me through the dark. "I hope you don't feel like I'm trying to rush you. Admittedly, I was moving fast with our little tour down memory lane. But that was just

because our deal was I had only the weekend to convince you of your identity. Now that we've crossed that bridge, you can take all the time you need."

"I'm not feeling rushed. I'm just... I'm still missing a few memories."

"What's missing?"

"When you fell from Paradise."

"You don't remember any of it?" There was an odd pitch in his tone, his words clotted with emotion.

"Only bits and pieces. Most of what I do remember is from Clotho's vision that day she was born. Not from the actual memory."

"Close your eyes then, and I'll show you the most important day of my life," he whispered. I did as he asked, and the next moment I felt his hand caress my cheek, making the contact needed for his ability to share his memories. "The day I met *you*."



LUCIFER

The Garden of Eden – Past

My head was angled toward the heavens. I couldn't help but wonder if Father could see me from up there, watching me as the first human woman He ever created sucked me off.

My hand went to her soft, brown hair. At the touch, she angled her head to look up at me through the fringe of her eyelashes. Her lips smiled around the cock jammed in her mouth.

Eve wasn't very good at it, but hey, this was literally the first time anyone was ever doing this, so it's not like there was an instruction manual or anything. We were literally making things up as we went.

"Suction your lips around it, my sweet ward. Yes, like that. Less teeth if you would." I sucked in a hiss as she followed my instructions. "Good girl, just like that," I crooned through a salacious smile.

My gaze skated down the naked form of the woman I had been charged with protecting. Her form was beautiful, her feminine curves like nothing I'd ever seen before. Of course, there were the celestial women in The Silver City, but they weren't the same as this. They were beautiful, yes. But they had been created long ago to be machines, the upholders of law and order. That made them hard and boring. This human, on the other hand, was soft and naïve. Putty in my hands. This whole new world my father created offered so much. It was more than a pretty garden filled with strange new creatures. It was the perfect playground for the bored Son of God.

I'm not really sure why Father decided to create these human creatures. Maybe it was to test the true limits of His powers. Maybe He, too, had grown bored. With the creation of the human race, He had invented a new role for us celestials. Guardians. Angel shifters with this role would have a human deemed special enough put in their charge. I had been given this gorgeous creature to protect. With my new responsibilities, all my attention was supposed to be on her, to keep her safe.

That was all well and fine. Easy enough when she offered so many new and interesting ways to keep us preoccupied. But what Father hadn't intended was us keeping each other busy like this. Then again, He didn't approve of anything fun. But what else were we supposed to do? Sure, the flowers of Eden were pretty enough, but one could only stare at Father's forbidden apple orchids so long before

one became bored out of their mind. I was much more interested in a different kind of fruit the garden offered. Eve's cherry, to be exact.

And she'd be happy to entertain my lusty notion, seeing as the mate Father had created for her seemed to think his time was better suited spent buried balls deep in the sheep rather than his own woman.

Pfft. Mortals.

"Does this feel good, Lucifer?" the woman purred against my cock. Then she took in the head of me and sucked while swirling her tongue over its tip.

"Fuck, yes."

She sat back on her heels, curiosity pooling in her brown eyes. "What does fuck mean?"

"Eh, I don't really know. I'm just kind of making stuff up as I go. We could make up a meaning for it."

"Like what?"

"Like what your Adam does with his sheep."

She wrinkled her nose. "That's disgusting."

I cocked a brow at her. "It could be far less disgusting if, say, we were to do it."

With her hands still on my shaft, her fingers quivered against it. "You mean...to mate?"

I could scent her arousal curling up from her sex, tickling my nostrils. For days now, we'd been fooling around. She'd tasted me with her mouth, and I'd buried my head between her thighs. We'd even done this diabolical thing where we'd laid down and had our mouths on the other's genitals at the same time. But we hadn't gone as far as to mate yet.

My beast was curious, but for whatever reason, he had no urge to shift and claim her as his own. Which completely threw me off, seeing as she was the most gorgeous creature I'd ever seen.

"You're only saying that because you're not into celestial women," he chuckled into my ear.

Yeah, well, this may be the first human female ever created, but why not her? She's beautiful, and she likes me. So why not her?

My beast answered only in an irritated growl and kept any further argument to himself.

"Yes, Eve. To mate. But I like the word fuck so much more. Don't you?"

Eve blinked up at me, her mouth curving downward with a frown. "But isn't it dirty?"

I laughed. "Celestials do it to make more celestials. Father created Adam for you so that you might carry a child. It's a pure act in a sense."

"Not if she does it with you," my beast grouched. *"She may like you because you look like her and Adam. But she won't like my form."*

The spirit could be right. Eve seemed at ease around me because I was one of two males she had met, and the other was a doughy pervert. I had yet to show her my true form, and that would likely frighten her.

"Will it hurt?" she whispered.

I stared down at her, completely at a loss for words. How was I supposed to tell her that I didn't know? In the world of sex, I knew little more than she did. The only difference was, I was bolder, and I wasn't afraid to risk my father's wrath. Of course, I hadn't actually bedded anyone before. But she didn't know that.

"I'm not sure," I admitted. "I'll be as gentle as I can."

She licked her lips in thought, eyeing my still-erect member with heat pooling in her eyes. "I want to. But do you think I can fit it?"

I sighed. Eve was naïve. Her innocence had intrigued me at first. Most celestials got so hard-up

for that kind of thing. But for some reason, the lack of inexperience on both our parts was just irking me. “I don’t know. Probably. As long as I don’t shift.”

“I’ve never seen your other form.”

“No, you haven’t.”

“Will you show me?”

“No,” my beast growled. *“Our true form is not for her eyes.”*

As if sensing my internal struggle with my beast, Eve grabbed my cock and gave it a little demure kiss. “Please?”

“Shut up and come out already. If you’re lucky, she’ll be too scared of my true form to let us touch her. So just get it over with already.”

For whatever reason, my words to my spirit did the trick. I could feel him rising to the surface.

There was a brief flash of pain like all my bones were snapping and cracking and stretching. My true form was larger, more formidable. I was nothing but sinewy muscle and sleek black wings.

I’m not really sure why Father had ever created me, but as vain as it made me sound, he’d made me a beautiful machine of speed and cunning with a sprinkle of sarcasm and a level of curiosity that bordered on madness.

I stretched out my onyx wings. Like my cock, they were larger than most celestials. And unique in color. No other had wings of my color. They were beautiful, my pride and joy.

The eyes on my inner forearm were the same color as my original two, amber, with three on each arm. All celestials had them. They allowed us to see things humans couldn’t.

Looking into them was strange since I didn’t have control over them like the ones in my head. Like my wings, they belonged to my beast. Staring into their depths was like looking right into the deepest part of my soul.

And for that very reason, I didn’t like looking into them.

No, my favorite celestial ability was the nifty skill of reading minds. It didn’t work on celestials, of course, but I could glean Eve’s every thought.

And that’s how I knew she was terrified of me. She was trying to hold a brave face, but her eyes were red and glossy as if she was trying to hold back tears, and her mind was a frantic tangle of mostly intangible thoughts. It was like a rabbit’s or a doe’s mind when they ran away in fear. The only thing filling her pretty little head at this moment was the survival instinct telling her to get away from me. To run away. To save herself.

I could hear her heart slamming frantically inside her chest. Her whole body shook as she looked up at me. Like I was some terrifying god of the Underworld.

Why was she looking at me like that? Why was she so terrified? I had expected her to be a little frightened, but this... She was cowering, utterly terrified to the point where she was rooted at the spot.

“Told you. She can’t handle the sight of me. This isn’t our true mate.”

I stretched out my hand to touch her, but she flinched away like I was about to strike her. “Eve—”

There was no time to comfort my ward because another voice rang out across the clearing where we stood.

“Lucifer.”

I slowly turned to see my brother. My twin. He carried my face. But his wings were brown and speckled. His eyes were narrowed into unkind slivers. Judgment and hatred radiated off Michael like poisonous gas. He always detested me, but as his gaze slid over my naked, cowering ward kneeling before me with my sacred body on display, his aura grew all the more potent. “Father demands your

presence in the Hall of Trials.”



LUCIFER



The Silver City was the capital of Paradise. A paradise above paradise. At least, that's how Father liked to advertise it. When he created humans, he didn't make them like he'd made celestial shifters. He made them soft and fragile. They wouldn't live forever. But he had declared, with the making of Adam and Eve and the rest of their kind, that for those who lived good, piteous lives, he would reward the souls inside their bodies entry to the Silver City.

That was all fine and well, but for me personally, I thought the place to be kind of boring. With one exception. The Hall of Trials. It was essentially where celestials who had broken any sort of rule had to go before Father and answer for their crimes. It was basically the place where rule-breakers would be put on trial and reap the consequences of their actions. I had served on the jury a handful of times before.

Celestials went on trial for all sorts of things. Cherubs not praising generously enough, or if a Valkyrie failed to polish her armor before going to war. Stupid little things. The punishments were small. Things like standing watch at the pearly gates for a year with no break. Or tending something mundane on Father's behalf like tending Eden's livestock or organizing the celestial scriptures in the Great Archive. Once I witnessed a trial for a principality class celestial who had slipped it to another celestial who wasn't his wife. Father had his testicles removed so that he could not further his line for fear that his love of adultery would taint the bloodline.

I'd gone on trial myself for little things. Once, when I was a child, I'd swapped the head of the Holy Fertility's statue with the head of a statue of Father, making it appear as though the Almighty himself had breasts.

Ah, the memory alone summoned a grin.

It's not like I liked His punishments. But the Hall of Trials was special, mostly because it was the only place I ever seemed to get any time with my father. If I wasn't breaking the rules, He barely bothered with so much as a hello.

As Michael and I stepped up to the grand gates of the Hall of Trials, the two lower-level celestials standing guard bowed low. "Your Highnesses. The Almighty awaits you inside."

As they began to haul open the heavy doors, light from inside sliced between Michael and me. I turned to face him, matching his smug smirk with one of my own. "You just love seeing me in trouble, don't you, Brother?"

His grin stretched wide, oozing with a sickening satisfaction that made my beast prickle with unease. "I love seeing you pay for your wickedness. Too long have you seeped yourself in sin, using

your station to protect you against Father's wrath. It's not fair that you should—"

"Oh, it's not fair, is it?" I sneered. "That's what this is all about. You've always been jealous that I'm Father's favorite. It enrages you that I have more fun than you. That I don't let my fear of Father squash my curiosity or need for something other than this boring place. And despite all that, he still likes me more. Well, I'm very sorry for your misfortune, but none of that is my fault. How about you turn your anger to Him? He's the one who plays favorites."

Even to this day, it was odd seeing my own face regard me with such loathing.

My own twin despised me. And I'm not really sure what I'd even done to him to deserve it.

"You're not Father's favorite anymore, *Brother*. Rumors of your depraved misdeeds have spread all throughout Paradise like a cancer, and it puts our family to shame."

"My misdeeds?" I blinked.

"Don't you dare play the innocent miracle card, Lucifer. Your cock didn't accidentally fall into your ward. You seduced her. You defiled her. You were charged with protecting her innocence, and you defiled it. You know what they are calling you now? The Prince of Darkness. You are the poster child for sin, and you shame us. You shame Father."

I stared at him blankly, unable to garner a response.

His lip curled into a cruel sneer. "What, no witty comeback? Where is the sly and cunning Lucifer now?"

The gates opened, and all the familiar faces in the grandstands made my heart plummet to the bottom of my stomach. Every single seat was filled. I'd never seen the Hall of Trials this packed, with faces I recognized and some I didn't. In the jury seats were the rest of my siblings. At least there was some relief in that. I hadn't been nervous about this trial until Michael had said the things he had. It would be just like him to blow this whole thing out of proportion. I'd been "in trouble" before, but his words had packed a particular punch, striking me deep, invoking an emotion I had no previous acquaintance with. Still, I knew it all the same.

Fear.

My wings pulled tight around my body as if my beast was trying to comfort me. Right now, I would give anything to be able to read my siblings' minds. What were they thinking?

I was probably psyching myself out. I'd get a minor scolding from Father and then be sent on my way. Still, it was comforting to see my other siblings on the jury. Amenadiel, Raziel, and Uriel didn't hate me like my own twin brother did.

Michael pushed me inside, and I hissed at him, pushing him away with a wing. He shot me one last, sour look before taking his seat with the rest of my siblings in the jury booth, leaving me to stand in the center of the stadium of seats with all their eyes on me.

Maybe I couldn't glean their thoughts, but somehow I didn't have to. The judgment radiating from all of them was palpable in the air.

Turning my attention to the empty throne that towered over everyone, I waited with bated breath for it to be filled.

It seemed like an eternity had stretched by before there was a blinding flash of light. Everyone squeezed their eye's shut to avoid losing their vision. Then, when I looked again, He was there.

Father.

The Almighty.

Lord and Master of the entire universe.

He was a handsome old man, I had to give him that. His white hair seemed to fall perfectly into place. His facial hair was nicely trimmed and never grew. He had bright, beautiful blue eyes with

many wrinkles in their corners from an eon worth of smiles. He wore simple, white clothes. He never was one for show unless it came to the things He specifically created. And I had never, ever seen him shift.

Ever.

He preferred to stroll around his kingdom, looking like a normal man. There was speculation, of course, as to what his true form looked like. But we could only guess.

“Father, what in the world is going on—”

“How dare you speak before the Almighty has spoken!” Michael hissed from the jury table.

I rolled my eyes at my twin. “Would you like me to help you down from that high horse, Brother? We wouldn’t want you to stumble and fall flat on your face.”

“Quiet, both of you,” Father muttered, his face carved with irritation.

The entire courtroom fell silent.

“Lucifer,” my father sighed. “My eldest son. You’ve brought shame and disappointment upon our family this day.”

“Yes, Michael was kind enough to fill me in on that part,” I said through a terse smirk. “Though I’m not really sure what my crime is.”

This caused a ripple of murmurs to burst out over the crowd. My siblings turned to each other, shaking their heads and whispering among themselves.

Father plucked up a bushy white brow. “Surely I don’t need to recount your crimes to the court, Son.”

“Go ahead.” I shrugged. “Seems like it will make for wicked good gossip later. Slather my name about, start your rumors. I can just read the papers now. ‘Former Favored Son of God, Fallen to New Depths of Depravity, Who Has Now Pulled His Innocent Ward Into a Web of Carnal Filth.’”

“That’s enough, Lucifer. When I selected you as the first guardian among all my celestials, I expected you to serve as an example for others to follow in your suit. You’re supposed to keep your ward safe, protect her.”

“I did. She’s perfectly safe. And I protected her from more than physical injuries. I shielded her from boredom.”

“You were supposed to protect her innocence.”

“I have! By keeping her away from Adam. You think I’m the salacious fiend? At least I keep my cock out of the wildlife.”

Another eruption of aghast whispers.

God held up his hand, and once again, silence settled over the courtroom. “You were supposed to refrain from defiling her.”

My brows bunched together. “I haven’t mated her yet if that’s what you’re getting at. Well, not in the traditional sense.”

Michael snorted. “Oh, come on, Father! You’re not going to let him slide by on that technicality, are you?”

“Shut up, Michael,” my little sister, Razel, hissed.

“Yes, ‘shut up,’ Michael,” I teased my twin through a dagger-sharp glare.

God sat back in his chair, rubbing His temples like He often did when His children bickered. Which was often. “The point of the matter is, My Son, you broke a rule.”

“Alright, I’m sorry. How would you like me to pay for this one? Hand me a mop, and I’ll clean all of Paradise if you wish. Or better yet, hand me a sword, and I’ll go to war with the Valkyries. I don’t care.”

Michael's expression darkened as a devious smile danced on his lips. "You will care."

"*This is heading in a bad direction,*" my beast whispered in my ear.

"What's that supposed to mean, Father?"

The Almighty let out a sigh that seemed to carry all the weight of the world. "I've grown tired of your games and your insolence, boy. Too long have you stretched the rules. The time had come where I gave you a man's job, Lucifer."

"I didn't ask to be a babysitter, Father," I seethed. My muscles were tense, every nerve in my body going hot and then cold, something that always happened when trouble was near. My beast was right. This "trial" was heading in a bad direction, and I couldn't shake the feeling that things were about to take a turn for the worst.

"You were given an important role, My Son. You were the first gifted with this new responsibility. Protect the humans, preserve them as I have made them as the world is sure to be unkind and cruel. You were not supposed to aid in their contamination."

I let out a choke of a laugh. "Contamination? All I did was give a woman pleasure. And she did so in return. I didn't even take her virginity yet."

"Please, Lucifer. You've already made your case."

I snorted. "Have I?"

Ignoring me, He turned toward His children in the jury. "My Sons and Daughter, how do you find your brother? Guilty of his crimes? While we cannot argue for his innocence, do you believe he should be allowed to walk free?"

I knew Amenadiel's answer before he even opened his mouth. It was written all over his stony, emotionless face. "Guilty."

"Guilty," Uriel echoed.

My eyes flicked to Raziel. My youngest sister and my favorite sibling. We had been close growing up. The tears streaming down her cheeks made my beast whine with a sort of harrowing sadness I'd never felt before. "Raz... Don't."

"Guilty," she said in a tremulous whisper.

My heart—if it was still even beating after being crushed—withered and sank as my attention slipped to my own face. One who looked at me like I was nothing, victory glittering in his amber orbs. "Guilty."

"I'm sorry, Father, but I have to say I think this is bullshit. I care for Eve! I haven't hurt her! So what if I was about to bed her? You put her in my charge, to cherish and protect. So maybe the way I choose to love her isn't exactly what all your unimaginative minds had thought of, but shouldn't it be my prerogative how I show my affection?"

"*You're lying,*" my beast sighed. "*We don't love her.*"

Yet again, he was right. We didn't love her. We wanted to. Maybe we would if there weren't all these rules around, preventing me from actually being with her. But judging by the way this was going, I wouldn't have a chance now.

"That's not the point," Father countered. "The point is, I expect all celestials assigned as guardians to take their role seriously. You have failed to serve as the righteous example I hoped you'd be. So..." He took a breath, His demeanor taking on a grave disposition. "You will still serve as an example for all guardians, should they feel tempted to follow in your footsteps."

My blood chilled, and I fought the urge to shiver. "What do you mean?"

Michael shot up from his seat, slamming his hands down on the juror's desk with wicked glee. "He means that you are going to serve as a warning, a cautionary tale to all guardians tempted to give

in to the basic, primal urges of their beast.”

I swallowed hard, squaring my shoulders and holding my chin high. Whatever the punishment was, I could take it. “Fine. Whatever. Let’s just get it over with.”

My father’s expression contorted with pain, and that’s when I had to fight the rising nerves, fraying at the stress of all this madness. “Lucifer, My Son. You were once my brightest star.”

A numbness settled over my body, and I couldn’t bring myself to show any regret even though the taste of it was bitter on my tongue. “Sure. I’m a disappointment all over. What is the punishment for my ‘crimes?’”

“You will be banished.”

My jaw fell open, hope rising into my chest and lifting me from the pit of self-pity I’d almost thrown myself into. “Wait. That’s it?”

That was more a reward than a punishment. In fact, it was the best possible outcome of this whole thing. I would have bedded Eve a whole hell of a lot sooner if it meant winning my freedom. I could go beyond Eden, explore other parts of the Earth that no celestial had yet seen.

My father’s frown deepened. “You’re not being banished to Earth, My Son.”

“What do you mean? If I’m not being sent there, then where—” The words froze in my throat like a winter maelstrom had set inside my own body, freezing me over. There were only three places in all of existence. Paradise. Earth and the space beyond it. And the Underworld. The Underworld was the only place largely outside my father’s jurisdiction. Creatures like us dwelled there. They, too, were shifters with a human form, but the spirits they housed inside their bodies were not holy angelic spirits. They were ancient, dangerous monsters. Demons.

The Underworld and all its nine layers was a land of chaos ruled by the devil king. He governed not only the demon shifters native to that realm, but with the birth of mankind, Father planned on giving him charge of all the mortal souls that had led a sinful life as well.

“You want me to go there and become its king, don’t you?”

If my father was surprised by my guess, he didn’t show it. “The king now is a chaotic, uncontrollable beast. Subdue him, take his crown, and turn Hell into something a bit more respectable.”

“Wait, Father. You can’t be serious? You’re giving him a throne?” Michael whined with an indignant hiss.

“I’m not giving him anything as I have no control over that realm as it is. He must earn it to win back his place here.”

I curled my lip, sneering. “A realm of chaos, huh? Sounds like complete paradise compared to this rigged, fucked-up dystopia. Paradise, my ass! Who says I’ll ever leave once I claim the crown and rebuild Hell in my image?”

“Because you’ll be leaving something very important behind.”

“Like what?” I couldn’t imagine what I would be leaving behind. I didn’t give a shit about anything here. Not anymore. Well, maybe Raziel. But at the moment, I was very angry with her. I could go without seeing her a few eons while I cooled down.

“Your wings.”



LUCIFER

What?

Maybe I'd heard Him wrong. Because He couldn't actually be suggesting to take away my wings. My wings were the thing that made me what I was. Without them, I would be stuck in my secondary form. My beast would be stuck inside me, my body a prison. I would lose most, if not all, of my abilities. Without them, I would be a sitting duck in Hell. Yes, surely I must have heard wrong.

But by the sickening grin of pure delight plastered on my twin's features, I hadn't heard wrong at all.

Raziel cleared her throat. "Father, this is a bit drastic of a punishment. Surely you could allow Lucifer to keep his wings if you expect him to defeat the devil king and claim his crown?" she argued in my favor.

"Drastic? This is pure insanity! You can't take my wings. Especially not if you plan on sending me to *Hell*. You might as well just take off my head."

"A celestial is inherently more powerful than a demon, even without his wings. Claim the crown. Make your way up through Hell. Then make your way back to your mate. You have defiled her, so you will marry her. Once you do all these things, then you shall earn your wings back and claim Eve as your rightful true mate."

"What?" Michael and I gasped at the same time.

"Father," Michael continued, "you can't be serious about giving him a chance to get his wings back. He shouldn't be rewarded with a chance of redemption. He doesn't deserve wings or a mate!"

"Father, this is ludicrous. I'm being punished for almost taking my mate, but my reward for weathering my punishment is giving her back to me?"

"I made her with you in mind, Lucifer. Not Adam. He was only meant to be another human companion. After you fulfilled your duty of protecting her, I was going to allow you to take her as your wife. But seeing as you couldn't wait, you will serve as an example to all others lacking in willpower and patience. All you must do is defeat the devil king, take his crown, make your way up through the layers to the surface and marry your mate. Only then will you have your redemption."

"He's wrong. Eve is not our mate. Not our true mate. We don't resonate with her."

I couldn't spare the time or the strength it would take to argue with my beast. Currently, I needed him on my side because at that moment, an archangel named Azrael came out of nowhere with a flaming claymore clutched in her hands.

The Flaming Sword of Justice.

It was said to be one of the few things that could kill an angel. Why Father would keep such an evil accouterment had been a wonder to me... Until now.

I stood my ground, a cocky smirk on my lips, letting her know I wasn't afraid of her. I was much stronger than her. She swung the sword toward me, and thanks to my celestial eyes, I saw her move. I dodged.

Unfortunately, she had the exact same power. She moved with me, making a counter strike almost the same moment I dodged. "What, I don't get a weapon?" I sneered up at my father as we fought, who looked down on me over his nose, appearing thoroughly unamused.

"This isn't a negotiation, my boy. The sooner you concede, the sooner you can start upon your task."

"Concede? Never! I'd rather you take my cock before you take my wings."

"Oh please, Father," I heard Michael whine over the hiss and sizzle of the sword as it came dangerously close to one of my wings, lopping a few black feathers off. "Let him make that trade."

"Shut up, Michael!" all my siblings now chided in.

The fight with Azrealla was more of a dance. We were perfectly matched on speed. If only I had a sword engulfed in flames, this would be over in seconds.

"Give up," she snarled at me, a thin layer of sweat beginning to pebble on her brow. "Go claim your crown, King of Sins. Lord of Darkness and Depravity."

"These names are getting good." I let out a laugh, unphased by her taunts.

"My Lord, I won't be able to keep this up much longer," Azrealla admitted as I stepped past another slash of the sword. The almighty signaled to the cluster of guards that had been standing by the gate. Six of them rushed forward, drawing regular swords.

Their attempts were pathetic. They were fast, but their abilities were lacking stacked up next to mine. Even unarmed, I managed to disarm them. Delivering a kick to the chest of the last standing guard, he slammed into the wall, and his sword clattered to the ground.

I picked it up, pointing it at Azrealla. "I'm sorry for this." Lunging forward, I stabbed the sword tip into one of her beast's eyes on her arm. A shrill scream filled the air, and she stumbled back. And dropped the flaming sword. I lunged for it. But another set of hands beat me to it. Jerking my gaze up, my blood turned as hot as the flames that rolled off the deadly weapon when I saw my own face staring back at me.

"Michael! Let go!"

A tendon ticked in his jaw as he struggled to wrestle the blade from me. "Brothers, sister! Help me!"

For a long beat, nobody moved. Our siblings stayed rooted to their seats. I could see the conflict raging behind their eyes, like an unnavigable storm. They had all voted me guilty, but that didn't mean they thought I should be ripped away from my wings and thrown into a chaotic realm filled with death and danger.

But Father's booming "help Michael" was all that was needed to sway them to pick sides.

Betrayal made my body burn as Raziel, Amenadiel, and Uriel threw themselves at me. Against all three, it was easy for them to wrestle me to the ground.

"Put him face down, wings up. Here, give me the sword Azrealla. I want to do it." Michael's unkind command slashed through my lungs, robbing me of all air.

I could shift back into my human form. I could draw this out. But I knew that in the end, I would not be finishing out this day with my wings.

"I'm sorry," I told my beast internally. "*You'll be locked inside me forever.*"

“Fuck that. I will not be trapped in you forever. You heard your father. Become the new devil king. Tame the chaos within your new realm. Then marry your true mate. After that, we’ll get our wings back.”

I swallowed down the bile that burned in my throat. The spirit inside me always had been an optimist. But I couldn’t seem to channel his optimism. Not right now, not with everyone I’d ever loved piled on top of me, holding me down so they could rob me of the thing that made me a celestial.

Footsteps sounded by my ear, and on the next breath, my twin crouched down so that he was now within my vision, the flaming blade in his hand.

“I’m going to enjoy this, Brother,” he whispered into my ear in a voice too low for anyone else to hear. “But know this. I don’t believe Eve is your true mate. I think if she was, you would have already fucked her by now. Since marrying her is the final step to get back the wings, I promise you this. I’ll find your true mate, whoever she is, and I’ll take her life.”

“Why?” I managed to choke out, unable to breathe beneath the weight of my siblings’ hands.

“Because you don’t deserve redemption. Go ahead and claim the crown, rule your beast and fuck as many demon whores as you wish. But you don’t deserve your wings. You don’t deserve to find your true mate. And you most certainly don’t deserve to be a part of this family.”

It’s funny how your brain can embellish pain. A sword literally crafted to slay angels, slicing through my flesh, should have been the greatest agony I’d ever endured. But the thing that burned the most wasn’t the deadly blade covered in flames. It was the sting of Raziel’s tears as they fell onto the gaping wounds where my wings had been just moments ago.

Then, as they stood back and the whole court went silent as I lay face down in a pile of my own blood and shame, I was thankful when the ground opened up and swallowed me.



The Ninth Circle of Hell – Past

Fathers are supposed to love their sons. At least, that's how my father designed all others to follow in his stead. But who says masters have to lead by example.

So condemn me for wanting a little bit of affection.

Banish me on the crime of curiosity.

As I plummeted hard and fast through the layers of hell, my flesh was in pure agony as flames consumed me. But it wasn't the flames from the fall that burned the hottest. It was the hot ball of molten rage that was forming where my heart had been.

I'd been humiliated.

Shamed.

Betrayed.

Cast aside like nothing.

In that moment, I felt like I was nothing. And that pissed me off the most. I was Lucifer, the Son of God. No, I was the Sullied Son of God, with a hopeless mission. Because how could I, a broken celestial, become king and master of a realm that I knew fuck-all about? Maybe if I had my wings, I could overpower this devil king. But without my abilities and my true celestial strength, it would be iffy. It's not like I could try the diplomatic method. Sure, I could be as charming as a silver-tongued serpent, but the demons here wouldn't want an unwhole celestial as their king.

Even if I could gain the crown of this realm, find my way up through the nine layers while containing their chaos, would Eve even want me to marry her once I made my way out? The way she looked at me when I'd shown her my true form set a gnawing sensation to my gut that was intent on eating me from the inside out.

"She doesn't want you. You were just a bit of fun. A better alternative to Adam. She isn't our mate."

"Shut up!"

My beast fell quiet, letting me simmer in my own self-hate and anger, which ate away at me like

acid. I, too, retreated into my own darkness, becoming resigned and empty as I plummeted toward what would be any other man's end and my new beginning.

A beginning I hadn't asked for. I hadn't asked for any of this.

Currently, my biggest drive to claim the crown and my mate was all so I could get my wings back so I'd have the power to kill Michael. It was thoughts of revenge that kept me warm as I slammed through a layer of thick ice and slipped into water so cold my spirit shivered.

Cold and wet, darkness swathed me. I was numb to the pain of it, even though my beast was basically screaming in pain at the back of my mind. But I couldn't feel any of it. The only sensation was the searing agony between my shoulder blades and the barbed ball of contempt that sat at the pit of my stomach. For a sad moment, I contemplated staying where I fell. The frozen lake of the Ninth Circle would be a fitting tomb for the outcast Son of God. How fitting of a piece to the story. *"Once he was God's favorite,"* they'd say. *"Now, look where he rests. See how far he has fallen."*

"Drown in your pity later. There's something down here with us."

"Who cares? I need time to wallow. You should be more upset. You've just lost your ability to leave my mind."

"This is pathetic. Is that what you want to be known as? The pathetic Son of God who was humiliated and then eaten by some random monster? Or do you want to rise from your ashes and become king? Take this realm by the balls. Claim our mate, and fuck her so hard that her screams will be Michael's warning that we're coming for him."

My beast was an amazing negotiator. Moved by his conviction, I swam upward. I broke the surface of the lake like a creature of the deep awakening from a long season of hibernation.

I rose with a scream in my lungs and a taste for revenge that burned so great, the ice shards around me began to melt. I began to pull myself up onto the ice when my gaze locked with another's.

For a heartbeat, the dark world around me stood still. On the shore of the lake stood a woman with pale skin the color of cream. Her hair was as black as the Ninth Layer's own darkness, her body slight, with curvy hips and large breasts. She wore only a thin dress that did little to shield her from my curiosity. She held a basket and stood by a bush picking its flowers. Even from this distance, I could smell it. Nightshade.

A thousand questions sprouted, torturing me, for I had none of the answers.

Who was this beautiful maiden who picked poison like it was just another damn flower? If she was a demon shifter, why was she in her softer, fairer form? By her beauty, she could be a succubus, but there was no other life around to seduce. She watched me with wide, gray eyes. They were so beautiful and completely void of fear. Instead, they reflected all the wonder and curiosity gleaming in my own. I fell into them, drowning all over again.

My lips parted on a question. "What's your name?" is what I wanted to ask. The single answer to that would bring me some calm, I think, as stupid as that was. But before I could push out the words, something grabbed my ankle and dragged me back down below the water's surface.

My human eyes were too weak to pierce the water's darkness, but I could still glean the magical energy the creature gave off. It made the water thick and dark like ink. Whatever it was, it was huge. It was lethal, and it wanted to eat me. I looked down at my ankle wrapped in a slimy, white tentacle.

I swam as hard as I could toward the surface, my silent scream releasing nothing but a torrent of air bubbles. Minutes passed, and I was still thrashing. It seemed even without my wings, I didn't need air to survive, but something told me any remaining celestial powers I still had wouldn't protect me from getting eaten alive.

I swam with all the strength I had. I was just within reach of the water's surface, but there was no

leverage, nothing to propel me upward while the creature continued to drag me under.

Then, an arm covered in pale pink scales thrust down toward me. I grabbed hold, and with surprising might, it hauled me to the ice. A demoness pulled me up, her talons slashing at the tentacle that held me, severing the appendage.

Splayed out on the ice, laying in the creature's blood, I stared up at the female. When I registered her eyes, I realized it was the same woman I had gazed upon minutes before.

She was completely naked now. I looked to the shore where she'd dumped her basket and her dress so it didn't get destroyed in the shift.

"Wait!" I cried after she shifted back and immediately scrambled away, her arms failing to preserve her modesty. Sitting up, I watched with complete fascination as she hurriedly shoved the dress back over her head. She was either embarrassed of her demon form or her nakedness. Or both. Although both were peculiar prospects considering this was a demon shifter of all things.

I got to my feet and made my way over to her, moving slowly so as not to scare her away. I realized from the uncomfortable gust of wind that tickled me in places I didn't care to be touched by Hell's elements that I was naked. My clothes had been burned off in the fall. I never minded being nude since Father had forgotten to add some modesty to my formula when he'd made me. But by the delicious color of red straining the demon's cheeks, she minded very much.

"I'm sorry if I'm coming on a little strong here, madam. I didn't think I was making the trip to this delightful corner of existence today. If I'd known my father was going to kick me out of Paradise, I would have dressed for the occasion. Then again, maybe this is the right outfit for an unwhole celestial here to take Hell's throne."

She gaped at me as if she didn't speak the same language. Maybe she didn't. Admittedly I didn't know a whole lot about this place or the creatures that called it home. If I'd gotten a little more notice that I would be coming here, I'd have done my homework. But even if we did speak the same tongue, I couldn't blame her for looking at me like I had a living snake between my thighs. I had just unloaded a lot of information, and she seemed to be reeling in it.

I stepped closer.

She took a step back, distrust making her eyes sparkle. "What did you just say?"

"Oh good, you can speak the common tongue." I let out a long-held breath. "I said... Well, I just said a lot. What part needs elaborating?"

"The part about you being a celestial, here to take over Hell's throne."

"Oh. Yes, well, that's about the gist of it."

"My—" Her throat bobbed with a thick swallow, and I couldn't help but watch the movement, transfixed by it. "The king is my mate."

"Oh. Well, that makes things awkward then, doesn't it? It's not like I want to be king. But my hand is being forced here. I have to claim the crown and then make my way out of here to my mate."

"I'll help you!" she urged, something I couldn't put my finger on making her eyes light up.

It wasn't common for me to be at a complete loss for words. But today was a day of many firsts.

"Er..." I ran my hand through my hair, the trusses already frozen over. "Maybe you didn't hear me. I want to overthrow your mate and steal his crown."

"There is nothing wrong with my hearing," she snapped. "I want to help you get the crown. I don't care why you want it, but you can't be a worse king than him."

"You'd betray your own mate?"

"He's not my true mate. He forced me to be his queen."

I couldn't help but stare at this woman, who had been demure and fragile looking the first moment

I'd laid eyes on her, in complete awe. Now when she spoke of her king, her beautiful steel-colored eyes lit up with a defiant fire that melted the ice around my heart. Before me stood the Queen of the Underworld, the mother of demon shifters. She was like nothing I would have ever imagined.

"What's your name?"

"Lilith."

"Lilith." I tasted the name on my lips. It was sweet and had a weight to it that made my beast stir with approval. "I'm Lucifer."

"Lucifer." She tested my name, and my beast purred when her lips quirked with a smile as she said it. "I like that name."

"Get closer to her."

I could count on my hand the times I listened to my spirit, but this time I couldn't find any reason to argue with him. I felt compelled to be closer to this creature. I took another step toward her, then another. This time, she did not shy away from me. Now that I was standing by the nightshade bush, I crouched down to pick up her basket and held it to cover myself. "Nightshade? For your unwanted king and mate, I'm guessing?"

She nodded, that defiance in her gaze growing brighter.

"Ah, well. It seems taking the crown might be a more pleasant task than I first surmised."

That small grin now broke out into a full-blown smile, and it knocked me completely off balance. Just then, a strong blast of wind rushed over us, pushing her scent toward me.

Every part of my body went stiff, including my cock. Thankful for the basket that covered the evidence of my arousal, I squeezed my eyes shut and focused on the task of calming the monster inside me. If I still had wings, he'd probably force the shift onto us.

"Mine. She's mine!"

"Don't be stupid. She isn't yours. Father said Eve is our true mate."

"He's wrong! This is the one. She smells divine. Like her scent was made for me. Mine, mine, mine."

She did smell amazing. Her fragrance was warm, like sunshine. Which made no sense because this female had never been to the surface, and while I knew little of this realm, I did know that none of its layers had a sun. Underneath the sunny scent was something else. Something fragrant and nice but deceptively so. Like the pretty poison she'd been picking.

Then another surprise slammed into me, like wave after wave crashing into me, intent on knocking me to my feet.

I caught a thought from her. The string of consciousness was murky, but I could still decipher much of it.

I could still read minds.

This little discovery was more than just good news. It meant that in this realm, I would have an edge. I wouldn't need the ability of my beast's sight if I was still able to glean thoughts.

I shouldn't listen in on this gorgeous creature's inner musings when I'd been given no license to do so, but curiosity had always gotten the best of me.

"Lucifer, are you alright?" she asked.

"Y-yes. I'm fine, thank you."

I had to applaud the control of her facial expressions. She regarded me like I was no skin off her nose. Like if I turned to take a running jump back into the lake, she wouldn't care too much one way or another.

But her mind was alive with as much curiosity for me as I had for her. I could see the way she'd

watched me fall from the dark sky, lighting it up like a star, making it as bright as morning.
Then I caught another voice in her thoughts, one she was doing her damndest to ignore.
“*Mine,*” her beast purred to her. “*He’s mine.*”



Emotion fisted my heart, squeezing fresh tears out of me that I hadn't meant to shed. I snuggled in tighter against Lucifer, holding onto him like I was afraid he might slip away again.

He'd shown me more than the day we'd met. He had shown me something I'd never experienced before. He'd opened up his heart and let me see all the scars his family had inflicted the day he took his wings. He'd allowed me to see all the pain and hurt he'd suffered, by watching it through his eyes.

I saw a vulnerability in him that he'd never exposed to me before. Like the way he secretly yearned for his father's approval and how his little knack for causing mischief was probably just a young Lucifer's method of securing his father's attention. How he had fooled around with Eve not because he loved her but because he was desperate for the attention and companionship he hadn't gotten from anywhere else.

And when he fell, he knew deep down that Eve wasn't his mate. His beast knew it, and even Michael knew it.

But he'd still been desperate to do as his father said. Not just so he could get his wings back and make Michael pay for the lifetime of what had gone far beyond sibling rivalry, but because he wanted his father's approval.

"I don't care what Father thinks of me now, Jessica. Please know that," the devil said, a silken whisper in my ear. "I stopped caring that day on the Styx. When you went into heat, and I kissed you, I knew you were mine. I knew Father had either been lying, or he'd been wrong about Eve being my fated one."

I turned in Lucifer's arms to face him. "But you didn't claim me until the Second Circle, in Lust."

He brushed back a rogue lock of my hair with his knuckle and gave me a sad smile. "That's because I still cared about getting revenge on my brother. I was afraid. Even if you were my true mate, there was a part of me that was afraid my father might deny it. He doesn't like admitting when he's wrong. Then I would never get my wings back. Without my wings, I won't have the strength to defeat Michael. But when you fell from that platform, all I could think about was how much I hated myself for not facing the truth."

"And what truth is that?" I asked, my breath catching in my throat.

"That I don't care whether or not you were created for me by the Almighty, The Fates, or the cast

of *The Lord of the Rings*. You're mine. My mate. My queen. My best friend." His eyes twinkled. "And hopefully, my soon-to-be wife."

"What?" I sat up, grinning down at him. "Lucifer Morningstar. You are not proposing to me with *The Lord of the Rings* mentioned in the same sentence."

He grinned up at me, his wicked smile sitting perfectly on the devil's full, sinful lips. "What can I say? I know my audience. Though when we recount the tale of my proposal, we should embellish it a bit. Make it worthy of the Lucifer all the humans imagine me to be."

I fell onto his chest and kissed him. "Don't worry. We'll tell them about this grand proposal complete with fireworks, the New York Rockettes, a live performance from all the members of the Beatles, and something to do with goodie bags filled with cocaine."

He snorted a laugh. The sound was melodic and as comforting as a favorite song, warming me all over. He wrapped his arms around me and deepened the kiss. When he finally broke away, he looked up at me, grinning from ear to ear. "You know, I could make all those things happen if that's your idea of a perfect proposal."

I rolled my eyes, smiling. "Of course, you could do all those things. But no. This is perfect." Curling up in his arms, I kissed his stubbled jawline and let out a happy sigh. "So, is that a yes?"

"It's a yes. It's always been a yes, My Morningstar."



I woke up to the devil kissing my neck. I was curled up into the cradle of his body, his fingertips digging into my hip possessively. I pulled the silk of my nightgown up over my thighs and arched into him, rubbing the valley of my bare ass into his rigid cock straining through his boxers.

He reached down to free his length, and a soft, swollen moan slid up my throat as he pushed his cock between the apex of my thighs, coating himself in my arousal. Hot, fervent need filled my core, and I bore down onto him, grinding against his shaft.

"You feel so damn good," I gasped.

"That's a good review," he murmured in my ear through a splintered chuckle, "considering I'm not even inside you yet."

"Let's change that." I reached around to grasp his cock and line it up for penetration, but he caught my wrist, holding my hand there.

"I want to savor it this time, Kitten."

The corners of my mouth lifted into a sultry grin. "You didn't want to savor it yesterday."

Lucifer's fire-flecked gaze banked with a hunger that filled my belly with a flutter of heat. "Yesterday was an eon of patience coming to an explosive end."

His fingers gripped mine where I held him, urging my hand to stroke his length, my arousal still on him acting as a lubricant. "Now, I want to savor you."

Something from one of the memories he'd shown me yesterday pushed to the front of my mind just then. "Why didn't you say anything?"

His lustful smirk slipped from his face, a more serious expression taking its place. "Say anything to you about what?"

"You never mated her."

"There were much more pressing things to fill you in on the last couple of days."

"No, I mean, why didn't you tell me before? Don't tell me you did because you didn't. I was very

jealous of your Eve for such a long time, so I would have remembered if you had told me.”

Lucifer’s left hand came to join his right, which still clasped mine over his cock. He shrugged, his wry grin returning to its old post. “I didn’t think it was important. I did do things with her, and my family always painted me as the villain who took the first maiden’s virtue, so why not play the part.”

“But you didn’t.”

“It doesn’t matter now.”

“It does matter. It matters to me. The only woman you’ve ever been with has been me.”

His brows arched. “Does that bother you? That I am not the womanizer playboy that everyone makes me out to be? I’m a fraud. Fitting room attendants at lingerie shops get more action than me these days, Kitten.”

“The only thing that bothers me is that you’ve been loyal to me, even before you knew I existed. Back when you still thought Eve was your mate, even if your beast didn’t. I’ve been kind of a big slut —”

“Don’t do that,” he hedged, his hand squeezing mine in warning, which still held his erection. “You don’t get to feel any kind of guilt. You and your beast didn’t remember me. Your memories were lost. My queen is a wild, sexual woman, and I won’t ever hold that shit against you. Not when you didn’t even know me.”

His words struck a chord in my chest. “You don’t care?”

“I won’t say I don’t care. And don’t get me wrong, if I ever catch any of the pathetic males who dared touch what’s mine, I’ll make them pay.”

I sent a horrified look in his direction. “You’d kill them?”

“No, nothing like that. But if they ever dine at one of my restaurants, I’ll charge them for the bread or have a waiter spill wine on them. Or when they die, I’ll give them an insufferable job like mopping the floors or wearing the giant mouse costume at the *Chuck E Cheese* on the Eighth Layer.”

“Is that all?” I laughed. “Wine stains and overpriced bread?”

“For the men who didn’t know that you were already taken, yes. Now for someone like Abaddon, that’s a whole different ball game.”

My eyes widened. “What did you have planned for him?”

“Not much more than you didn’t already beat me to. Which still gets me hard thinking about it.” His member twitched in my hands as if to prove his point.

“I have to say, you’re not very devil-like Lucifer Morningstar. At least, you’re nothing like what everyone has imagined for the last few thousand years.” I pulled my hand out from under his and crawled up between his thighs. “But they got one thing right...” My voice dripped with desire as I brought my mouth to the tip of him. I enjoyed the way his breath shuddered as I ran the point of my tongue up the length of his shaft.

“And what’s that?”

“That you’re a huge pervert.”

He laughed as his fingers knotted in my hair, watching my mouth like it was the most hypnotic thing he’d ever seen. “Says the woman with her lips pressed against Satan’s dick.”

I tasted the little bead of arousal that gathered at the tip of his cock. A purr-like growl rattled from his chest, pulling my gaze up to meet his. I opened my mouth, a similar purr tumbling from me. I knew it was our beasts, speaking to one another in a way not our own. Lucifer almost looked taken aback for a second. “Jessica. Remember the memory I showed you when I claimed you the first time on the Second Circle?”

My body pulsed with raw hunger at the memory of that night when I’d fallen from the

construction platform, and had gotten tangled up in the ropes. It had been that moment that Lucifer chose to claim me for the first time. It had been painful, a little bloody, and despite that, damn near perfect. "I remember."

"You have to know that my spirit was more in control that night than I was. And for a moment, he came out yesterday when I took you in the museum on the Seventh Circle."

I peeked up at him through my screen of blonde hair and smirked, gathering the gist of what he was getting at. "I liked it rough back then."

"And now?"

My beast let loose a violent purr, and in response, Lucifer's amber eyes filled with desire as his mate called to his. "I've changed in a lot of ways since you knew me last. *A lot*. But that part hasn't changed. I may be human now, but I'm still the demon queen. And I can take it however my king wants to give it to me."

My skin heated under the way he was looking at me now, like I was something to be eaten. Lucifer and I were a good match for several reasons. We could both laugh at stupid shit, but on the flip side of that, we could keep the other on their toes. He could see right through me, and I could see right through him. And now, with all my memories back, I trusted what I had seen the moment I stepped into Siren's and made Satan a cosmo.

That he would go through hell for me, and I for him. And as it so happened, we had both done that already.

And my favorite thing of all: he could reign over my body with all the strength and prowess he used to rule Hell.

His smile twisted into something sinisterly seductive. "It's not going to be like it was with your frat boys, Kitten. I may have only had one woman, but I know how to play that woman like a damn fiddle. And I've had years to imagine this moment and just how much I'd dominate that tight little body of yours once I got my hands back on it."

His words slithered through me, sinking straight through my already soaking core. "How do you want to fuck me?"

"In every single way man or beast has ever conceived. But right now, let's start with you laying down on your back. Spread your legs for me, and show me what belongs to me."

Flipping onto my back, I began to lay down but stopped when I caught Lucifer's expression. "Bare yourself to me, Kitten. I want to see all of you."

I peeled the silk nightgown off in one tug and threw it to the floor. Leaning back, I propped myself up on my elbows and let my legs fall open.

His hungry gaze roved down the length of my body like a creature in heat that hadn't known the touch of a mate in years. He purred his approval, his fingertips grazing the interior of my thigh, slipping down to where his mark blessed my skin.

"Do all shifters mark their mate with a satanic crest?" I grinned mischievously, already knowing the answer.

"Only me. We could settle for the go-to bite mark or, even more boring yet, my scent. But where's the fun in that?" He brought his lips down upon the mark and kissed it with a tenderness that caught me off guard. "Do you know what it means?"

"It's your name," I answered in a tremulous whisper.

He settled between my thighs and glanced up at me with his mouth so close to my opening, his breath tickled it. "I can remove it if you find it too crude."

"No, I like it there." Honestly, I'm surprised I didn't have more tattoos. I was totally that kind of

girl. I loved the idea of covering my body with cool art that would make old people stare. But maybe my beast knew that my first one was always supposed to be this one.

Lucifer let out a small, gravelly growl in approval. My head rolled back when he brought his mouth to my entrance, letting the sound reverberate there, earning himself a thick moan. As his tongue slid through my arousal, my every sound filled up the room, creating an erotic spell that wound us tightly together.

“Look at me, Kitten,” Lucifer demanded. “Look at me when I’m tongue-fucking you.”

My attention went back to him just as he slowly started to sink his tongue into my depths while holding fiercely onto my gaze. His lips curled into a smile against me as he watched my face contort. “How do I feel?” he murmured into me.

I shivered under the waves of pleasure crashing down over me. “Fucking *great*.”

“What about when I do this?”

“Oh!” I jumped with a shudder as two fingers took the place of his tongue, and his lips suctioned down on my clit, teeth grazing it before giving it a gentle suck. It was the perfect mix of pain and pleasure. “Oh fuck, Lucifer!”

“Is that a request?” He chuckled. “What are you going to do to earn my cock, woman?”

My eyes rolled back in my head, and he pushed his fingers deeper inside me. “I’m going to marry you, you devil.”

“That’s right, you are. You’ve been my mate before. And you were the queen I stole from another. But you’ve never been my wife before. I’m going to have you in every single way I can, Jessica Sims. In your last life, this one, and all others to follow. You understand me?”

I gave him a sloppy nod, delirious with lust.

“Good. Now, are you ready for me to fuck you so hard you’ll feel me inside you for weeks?”



Just like he warned, Lucifer's hunger grew to the point where I knew he was no longer in complete control of his own actions. His celestial spirit was coming out to play with me, and for whatever reason, that just turned me on all the more.

I spread my legs further apart so he could see just how wet he was making me. He crawled over me, and I let out a surprised yelp when he grabbed my wrists and slammed my arms over my head, pinning them to the bed with one hand and covered my mouth with his other.

My cry turned to a whimper of pleasure when he pushed inside me with one swift thrust. He let out a dark snicker as he watched my eyes roll back from the intensity of it.

"How does it feel knowing your cunt is the only one I crave to fuck, that your womb is the only one I imagine filling with my seed?"

I groaned my answer, writhing my pelvis against his so that I could take him deeper, harder. My core clenched around his sweet invasion, the bliss far exceeding the pain. Damn, he felt good. I'd said it before, and I'd say it again, this dick was good enough to sell one's soul for.

I moaned my answer into his palm, tears gathering in my eyes from the sheer intensity of it all. Sensing the orgasm looming over me, his thrusts picked up the pace. His movements were slow at first, but each pump was hard and sent a spasm of delicious fire ripping through my body with every stroke. It was glorious torture, the way he was rough with me but drew it out with the patience and precision of a true master.

His hand slipped from my mouth, and the full weight of his body came down on me, his arms caging my head in while he continued to pin me down. "Scream for me, my fiery little demon. I want Paradise to hear you coming undone around my cock." He emphasized every word with an enthusiastic slam of his hips, and the ensuing orgasm was violent. It stretched so deep it kissed the spirit of my beast. It made her purr and me scream. His handsome features took on the most erotic expression as he watched me shatter around him.

Then his mouth came crashing over mine in a kiss that bled his devotion and demanded mine right back. When he suddenly tore away, he left me lifting off the bed after him in an attempt to chase his lips. But he still held my arms down with one hand, and with his other, he captured my jaw and forced my gaze on him.

The look he gave me caused my whole body to quake beneath his. His amber eyes had turned to

molten lava, and as I stared into their scorching depths, I saw something dangerous and lethal looking right back at me. Then I knew it was Lucifer's beast looking down at me, in control of this moment.

"Do you know who I am?" he growled, his voice a heady baritone, coarse and rough. It scraped over my every nerve, causing beads of sweat to gather on my brow.

"Y-yes."

"Say it. Say what I am."

"You're my mate."

"That's right."

He looked down to where we were connected, and my whole body flushed as his lips slowly split into an impish grin that was all teeth. "If only I could shift. Oh, the delicious ruin I could bring down on your tight cunt with my true form. There's nothing more virile than a celestial in its true form."

"I'll take you in whatever form you prefer, but know I like both sides of Lucifer. You make him hard and rough and cruel at times. But in his true nature, he's soft and kind. And I love both of you."

Lucifer's beast purred his approval. He pulled out, flipped me over, and lifted me onto my hands and knees. He draped his frame of sinew and muscle over my small, delicate body and grazed his teeth over my shoulder. "My host wants you to be his wife. You must know I don't care about that. Neither does the creature inside you."

I peeked past my shoulder at him and suppressed the shudder of wicked delight as I saw him looming over me, his hands possessively gripping my hips. "No?"

His tongue moved in an erotic stroke, slow and suggestive over his lower lip. "No. I am ancient. Such things are meaningless to me. Marry him because it will make you both happy but know the thing that will give me true pleasure is seeing my mate round and swollen with my babe in her womb."

His words shocked me to the core, and with them came a depraved swell of heat that made my body burn even more for this animal's release inside me. I couldn't get pregnant now, not with the IUD implant I had. But I could recall some fuzzy memories of Lucifer and me trying before, back when we'd holed ourselves up in this very room for years, reluctant to bring our journey through the nine layers to an end.

My belly was a knot of emotions as I recalled the memories more clearly.

We had tried for a baby for a few decades. Nothing ever came of it. Part of me wondered if it was The Fates that prevented me from getting pregnant. My nieces would have known my life with Lucifer was going to come to a very long pause. They wouldn't have wanted our child to go motherless. It would have been too hard on them and even harder on Lucifer.

From Sane Jessica's perspective, things were moving at lightning speed with Siren's owner. From Reckless Jessica's perspective, or rather my beast's, things weren't moving fast enough since it had literally been at least a thousand years since I'd been with my one true mate. I'd been so impulsive before, never settling down. But it wasn't because I didn't want to. It was because I hadn't found the right person.

Now here he was.

We were talking about huge things here. But I had already agreed to marry the devil, so I needed to be honest. If I was going to have anyone's baby, it would probably be Satan's. Not the church's idea of Satan, of course. Just the one behind me, looking down at me like I was the goddess of the whole damn universe. The one who ultimately just wanted his father to love him. The one who'd helped me find my inner strength all those years ago, who'd pushed me to the limits and when I broke apart, he was there to put me back together again.

As it turned out, Lucifer Morningstar was more human than anyone would ever know. And that

was one reason, among many, that I'd fallen for him in the first place.

I purred back at my mate and swayed my hips seductively, enticing him to fill me once more. "Kill Michael for us, Beast. And you can have my womb to fill as your reward."

"That's a deal," he agreed with a guttural growl. He sealed our agreement with a punch of his hips, filling me with fire as he stretched me with his delicious invasion. This time, there was nothing slow about his movements. He took me from behind, hard and fast. He shook me to my core, ripping me apart from the inside out as he claimed me with brutal and ravenous strokes. His hands roamed over my curves, threaded in my hair, and gripped my ass like he couldn't get enough of me.

"Lucifer, *please*." He was pushing me over the edge, but I was still on the precipice, teetering over with the other end in sight. Flipping us over yet again, he now held me so that I was on top with his back pressed into the mattress and my thighs clamping around his hips.

"Ride me, Kitten," Lucifer gritted, his voice having returned to normal.

I fucked him with reckless abandon, chasing the little flicker of flames growing fast in my core like an inferno. His hands gripped my waist, helping me slam down into him, lifting me like I weighed nothing. I cried out as a convulsion ripped through me like a wildfire intent on total destruction, turning me to ash. As I came undone, he came spiraling down with me. The most delicious groan fell from his lips as he released inside me, filling me with a warmth that I was already addicted to.

I collapsed onto him, our chests rising and falling in sync with each other as we collected our breaths. His arms wrapped around me, pulling me flush with his body. I smiled happily, still steeped in the after-effects of the best sex I'd ever had. At least with this body.

"Are all angels as good at sex as you?" I peeked up at him through the fringe of my bedhead hair, my hands roaming idly over his muscular form.

His guttural laugh was all gravel, sinking straight through my core to join the place where his cock was still buried, now semi-soft. "I like to think Father gave me a pretty face and a huge dick to make up for the fact that I've got no soul."

I gave him a soft, reverent smile. "You've got a soul, My Morning Star."

The molten pools of his eyes glittered hearing his old pet name on my tongue. "How can you be so sure?"

"People without souls don't tear apart the world for an eon in search of their mate. They don't rebuild Hell so the people who live in it can have a better life."

"Even with all that, how can you be so sure I have a soul?"

"Because I've seen it. I've held it. Tasted it." I propped myself up on his chest, grinning maniacally. "And you want to know something else?"

"Oh, Fates, yes."

"I own it, King of Hell. I own your soul. Just like you own mine." Then I kissed his stunned lips with an infernal smirk that I'd stolen from him.



A knock at the door pulled me from bliss's embrace. I let out a groan as Lucifer pulled himself out of bed and began dressing. "Do we have to ever leave this room?"

He chuckled as he pulled on his slacks. "I'm afraid so, my love. If I keep you here, your friend Gabriel will think I'm keeping you hostage, and he'll come hunting me down with the Flaming Sword of Justice. I'm hoping to convince him tonight that I'm the good guy so that he'll betray Michael by giving me the sword so that I can kill him with it."

"Wait, tonight?"

"Mhm. It was going to be a surprise, but maybe it's best you have some heads-up on this one. I contacted your friend Melanie and invited her and her guardian lover to Siren's tonight for drinks. So that we can talk."

"You want them to be in on the plan to kill Michael?"

"Well, all I really need from them is the sword, really. But first, we must convince Gabriel to give it to us. Which might prove a difficult task considering he's been brainwashed by the celestials his entire life. He still thinks me the big-bad devil whose probably holding you hostage. If he sees we're in love, and hears our story, he might change his mind."

I chewed my lip, nodding. "I think he might. Do you think the sword will be enough?"

"Unfortunately not. It takes a powerful celestial to wield the sword and I'm afraid I won't be able to brandish it without my wings, at least not properly."

"So that's why you want to get married. So that your father will give you back your wings, giving you the power to wield the sword and kill your evil twin?"

"I want to marry you because I love you. Murdering my brother as retribution for taking away the love of my life once before and trying to do it a second time is just the cherry on the cake."

The knock sounded again and Lucifer invited them in. A second later the door pushed open and a familiar head pushed through the door.

"Cerberus!" I exclaimed, pulling up the sheet to cover myself. My mouth began to water as my attention went straight to the tray of food he held in his hands. "Damn. That smells delicious!"

The chef beamed with pride, carrying the tray over to me. "Oh, My Queen, I'm so glad to see you back among us. I can now address you by your actual title! It was horrible having to address you

below your station at Canlis.” His nose wrinkled in self-disgust as if addressing me as “My Lady” had been some great offense worthy of capital punishment.

“It’s alright, Cerb. I told you to call me Jess anyway.”

“Oh, um, yes, of course, J–J–Jessica,” he stuttered, finally managing to pass the name with all the effort of passing a kidney stone.

I frowned, and Lucifer snorted as he buttoned up his shirt in the periphery of my vision. “Oh, just let him call you whatever he wants, Kitten. Otherwise, you’ll give him a nosebleed.”

I laughed, picking up the knife and fork to begin digging into the delicious breakfast of pancakes, eggs, and bacon the hound had prepared. “Well, you did sav my life, Cerb, so you can call me whatever you want.”

The shifter’s cheeks bloomed with heat, and his eyes danced with joy. “You honor me, Queen Jessica!”

“Oh, I actually kinda like that one.” I grinned through a mouthful of pancake.

Lucifer chuckled as the chef dismissed himself from the room with a twitchy series of bows. “You’ve made him very happy.”

“Good. He’s a good friend. Though someone should probably be monitoring his caffeine intake. I wonder what Greek historians would say if they knew the terrifying three-headed hell hound was more like a hyperactive poodle puppy who broke into a Red Bull manufacturing plant and went wild.”

Before Lucifer could dignify my ridiculous analogy with a response, there was another knock at the door. Nyx appeared in the doorway a moment later, and my jaw fell open in surprise when I registered that my sister had chosen to appear in her demon form.

Her skin was a soft, dusty lavender color, just as I remembered. I remember stroking her scales at night when we’d curl up to go to sleep in our den and being jealous of her coloring. Her hair was long and dark like mine used to be, but in her demon form, it seemed even longer, silkier. Her horns were as delicate looking as the rest of her, but they were deceiving. I knew for a fact that she sharpened them just in case she needed to stab any overly handsy males. I wondered if she still did that, or maybe these days she opted for the more modern convenience of mace.

“My King, may I have a moment alone with the queen?”

Lucifer looked between us with a softened expression and nodded. “Of course.” He finished pulling on his suit, ran his hands over his hair to slick it back like it had been that night at Siren’s, and stuck me with a heart-melting smile. “Catch up with your sister, Kitten. I have some errands to attend to. I’ll come back in a few hours, and we’ll head to Siren’s for drinks as discussed. And after that, I’ve got a surprise for you.”

There was something in his gaze that I couldn’t discern, but it made my chest squeeze. He was up to something, and something told me it wasn’t the kind of surprise I was going to like much. “Don’t I get to know more?”

“I’m afraid not. But I want you to look expensive. Nyx will help you find something suitable. Wear something—”

“Red,” I said, finishing the thought for him with a teasing wink. “Satan’s favorite color. Got it.”

He leaned over the bed to press a kiss to the corner of my mouth and left the room, leaving my sister and me alone for the first time in... Well, I didn’t really know how long it had been.

“I’m almost afraid to ask, but how long has it been, Nyx?”

She shook her head, her sleek, threaded brows knitting together. “I’m not really sure. Too damn long, Lil.” Her cheeks bloomed with twin stains of pink. “I mean Jessica.”

“It’s alright. You can call me whatever you want.”

She moved into the room and closed the door behind her. “But the king calls you Jessica. I think he does so because he understands that you’re not the same person you were before. We both loved Lilith, and now we will both love you as Jessica. The name doesn’t matter. All that matters is that I have my sister back.”

Not caring that I was still naked, I flung the sheet away and threw myself off the bed and into her arms. She laughed as tears welled in her eyes. “I fucking missed you, Queen of Hell.”

I rolled my eyes, laughing. “Don’t start with me. You know I never really cared about being queen before.”

“But you care now that you’re not *his* queen anymore.” When I went rigid in her arms at the mention of Abaddon, she pulled back and struck me with a look of pride. “What you did yesterday was amazing. You saved my life, Dear Sister. After you barely remembered who I was, you didn’t even have to think about it. You just did it.”

“You would have done the same for me.”

“Yes. But you were the one to do it for me, and I will always love you for it. Not to mention the entire Second Circle is in a tizzy about what you did to Abaddon. I don’t know if Cerberus is embellishing but the way he tells it…” She dropped her voice to a low pitch, the corners of her lips twitching as if holding back a grin. “Did you really make him rip off his own manhood and gag him with it before he died?”

I bit my lip to hold back the devious smile taking over my mouth, which made hers break out in full form. “You did! Not even a full hour after you got your memories back, and you made good on that promise you made with your beast all those years ago. You really are Lilith,” she went on. “Not that I had my doubts, mind you. I knew it the second I laid eyes on you. Your hair is different now, and you’ve got more curves now that fast food is a thing.”

She ignored my indignant “hey” and stood back to look at me, shaking her head in disbelief.

“But it’s still you. You smell like the surface’s sun, just like you always did. I can sense your beast pacing around inside you. Is she going stir crazy?”

“Sometimes. She became absolutely crazed when I was at work. She wasn’t into the whole rat race thing. Being Queen of Hell is more her speed.” I plopped back onto the bed, covered myself with the sheet, and Nyx moved to sit beside me.

“It doesn’t bother you that I appeared in my demon form?”

“No, I’m glad you did. It makes Reckless Jess— My beast, I mean, happy.”

“You don’t miss shifting?”

“Honestly, not really. As you’ll recall, I never really liked it.”

A sad smile overtook her beautiful features. “It’s as if you were always meant to end up like this. I don’t know why they planned for things to turn out this way, but I know this is what the triplets intended the whole time. Things will turn out in our favor, Sis. Even if it’s a long time coming, things are finally working out for us.”

“Lucifer said you went to visit them in the Tenth Circle?”

She gave a grave bob of her head, and for a split second, her expression hardened, like she was going back to some dark place in her mind. “It was a terrible place. There is no light there at all. It’s like a black hole. It doesn’t matter if it’s from a campfire, a flashlight, or the Eye of Sauron, it sucks up all light.”

“Then how were you able to find your way through?”

“That’s the weird part. I was able to navigate through it without much of a struggle. Probably

because of the archdemon blood in my veins.”

“How were they?”

“Cryptic. They live like we used to, basically like animals in a cave, but they’re happy.”

“And Erebus?” I was almost afraid to ask, but I couldn’t keep a cap on my curiosity.

“He was there.”

“And?”

“He... He wanted me to stay.”

“Nyx! That’s great! Why didn’t you?”

“Because I was waiting for you to return here. I knew Lucifer was getting close to finding you. He could feel you were alive and living in Seattle. That meant it was only a matter of time. I’m glad I came back.”

I was so happy that Nyx got to see her mate and daughters, but part of me couldn’t help but feel guilty for being the reason she wasn’t with them now. Gleaning my guilt, she clasped my hands and smiled at me.

“Don’t do that. This moment is all worth it. I love Erebus and our daughters, but my place is here, for now. I take great pride in helping the king keep things nice and orderly in the nine circles while he conducts his business on the surface. Now. Let’s get you into something that’s going to make that mate of your putty in your hands.”

 LUCIFER

As the Rolls-Royce limo rolled up to the curb of Siren's Supernatural Club for Wicked Gentleman, the neon light from the flickering sign streamed in through the windows, bathing my mate's flesh the color of sin.

I looked over at her, unable to bring myself to get out of the car. All I could do was stare at her, completely transfixed by her beauty. I'd seen her caked in mud and shit. I'd seen her naked more times than I could count, in scrubs, jeans, and frilly lingerie, and I loved her in all of it. But nothing compared to how she looked now, dripping in crystals and diamonds like the goddess she was.

Nyx, as usual, did not disappoint.

She had chosen to dress her sister in a strapless, ruby-red evening gown with a steep slit running up either thigh. The entire garment was encrusted in Swarovski crystals that glittered in the light like diamonds. Jess's blonde hair was down tonight, her golden locks falling to frame her face perfectly. She wore very little make-up, only a sweep of eyeliner and red lipstick. Around her neck, she wore a diamond necklace with a pendant of my crest to match the one on the interior of her thigh.

Her hands held a black Alexander McQueen clutch with a black skull clasp with rubies set in the eye sockets.

"You look like temptation incarnate tonight, Demoness."

She gave me a look that had my cock straining in my slacks. "You would know."

I let out a soft purr, and she climbed into my lap, wrapping her arms around my shoulders as her eyes made a languid trek down my body. "You look pretty damn good yourself, Sire."

I tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear, chuckling. "You're stalling."

She sucked her bottom lip between her teeth, cheeks flaring with heat at being caught. "I'm nervous."

"I don't blame you, Kitten. From what you've told me, you've been friends with this guardian and his ward for some time. You want your friends to like me."

She gave a tentative nod. "Especially since Gabriel liking you means he'll give you the sword. Which is the key to killing Michael."

"Which is the key to us being happy. Yes, believe me, I am going to try my damndest to make a good impression. But while helpful, it's not the key. If Gabriel doesn't give me the sword on his own accord, I can always make him. But seeing as you care for this celestial, we'll try being nice first."

Her perfect, fuckable lips pursed into the most soul-stealing smile. *Bleeding Almighty*. She was beautiful when she smiled at me like that. Like I was someone worth loving. How I loved the version of myself she saw through her eyes.

“I fucking love you, Jessica Sims.”

She angled herself in my lap so that her belly was pressed to mine, her knees clamped around my hips. I’d have to remind myself to thank Nyx later for choosing this particular dress.

Jessica wiggled her hips, making me hiss through my teeth as she ground her apex down onto my rigid shaft. “Pretty soon, I’ll be Jessica Morningstar.”

“If you’re trying to stall by making me rethink hosting your friends and instead take you right here in the backseat of my limo, you’re doing a capital job.”

And there it was, the glorious scent of her arousal curling up from between her thighs.

“Maybe you should. In fact, I want you to.”

I made a pained sound as I opened the door, grabbed her by the hips and lifted her outside. In turn, her mouth conformed into a pout that drove me wild, and it took all my damn willpower to not pull her back into the limo and take a raincheck with the awkward confrontation I was about to have with this celestial friend of hers.

Fucking my soon-to-be bride seemed like a much better way to spend my time. At least, that was the opinion of my raging hard-on. But convincing Gabriel that he was on the wrong side was currently a more important task at hand, as painful as that was to admit.

Placing my hand on the small of my mate’s back, I guided her toward the front door of Siren’s and leaned to whisper in her ear. “You’ve got me so worked up. After we say our hellos, get a few drinks in you, and get that sword, I’m going to take that hungry little cunt of yours in the car.”

“Is that my surprise?”

“No. And if you think your surprise is going to be even a fraction as enjoyable as my cock buried eight inches inside you, you’re about to be sorely disappointed.”

“Surprises are supposed to be fun.”

“All I can promise you is that your surprise is going to be interesting.” I loved the look she wore when curiosity was eating away at her from the inside. It made her gray eyes light up like a bright morning following a night storm.

Inside, Siren’s was bustling with energy. For a Monday night, business was good. “Ah. Good. Hardly any wolves tonight.”

Jessica’s gaze sifted through the crowd, her brows plucking up with interest. “You don’t like wolves?”

“I don’t mind them in particular, but the girls here hate them. Bad tippers. Rude manners. But celestials despise wolf shifters. I only want to make this as pleasant an experience for your friends as possible.”

“Then why pick your strip club to meet? Don’t you own half the businesses downtown?”

A server wearing next to nothing strode over to us with a tray in hand, a single glass with two fingers of whiskey sitting on top of it. “Thank you, Candice. Would you be a doll and fetch a Cosmopolitan for my queen?”

“Yes, Sire.”

When she scuttled off, I turned toward Jessica, my grin morphing from polite to diabolical. “I had thought about inviting them somewhere else. Someplace less seedy. Then I thought about it and realized that the whole point of this is to gain his trust. If I make a big show of tonight, flash my wealth with a fancy dinner at some random place I own, he’ll suspect I’m trying to trick him because

he'll think I'm going out of my way to sell him a different image of me. Which would be true. This place, on the other hand, is a perfect reflection of how he perceives me. The perverted king of debauchery."

"But you are the perverted king of debauchery."

"That's true. And I want Gabriel to see that that alone doesn't make me the villain."

"Jess!"

The familiar face of Jessica's friend Melanie pushed through the crowd of patrons and flung her arms around my girl. She wore a simple, low-cut black dress and just like she had the night she came here with Jess, she looked completely out of her element.

"Mel! Oh my God!"

I watched with quiet fascination as they squealed at each other like it had been a century since they'd seen one another rather than a single weekend.

"Jess, what the heck! You haven't been answering any of your texts! Gabe and I have been so worried about you!" Melanie's eyes darted in my direction, her cheeks burning up. She knew I could read minds, and her little head was buzzing like the static between radio stations with a million frantic thoughts all tangling together in one giant mess.

"It's good to see you again, Ms. Gibson. I hear you have smoothed things out with your guardian and that Paradise has not reprimanded him for breaking the rules by sleeping with you. What a wonderful exception he's been given."

"*Too bad Father doesn't grant the same kind of forgiveness to his own children,*" my beast groused.

I kept this little bit of internal grumbling to myself and simply passed her a polite smile.

"Um...yeah." She was blushing so much, her cheeks were almost the color of Jessica's dress.

"You look freaking *amazing*, Jess. What's happened to you the last couple of days?"

Melanie was a shy girl in comparison to her spitfire of a best friend. Plus, she was polite, so it wasn't likely she'd come out and say what she was thinking. But why bother when I could hear it in her mind. She was wondering what I'd done to Jess. Gabriel had probably already poisoned her mind against me.

"Thanks, girl. But the dress weighs a million pounds. I'd give my left tit for some jeans and a t-shirt, but Mister Fancy Pants here likes his dates to have more sparkle than a Tiffany's jewelry counter, I guess. Hey, where's Gabe?"

Mel's color went from red to ghost white. I narrowed my eyes on her, trying to pick apart the thoughts running through her head faster than the heart of a hummingbird. This made her even more nervous, knowing that I could read her mind.

"Oh dear," I tutted. "It seems our guest obtained a key to the back door from Abaddon when he was here Friday night. Why does that not surprise me? What was his game? Hide behind the beer cases and leap out at me when my back was turned? That's terribly uncreative for a celestial his rank."

"N-no! It's nothing like that. At least, I hope he had a better plan than that. I tried to talk him out of it, for what it's worth."

"Not much, I'm afraid, seeing as your efforts were fruitless."

Jess swung a glare in my direction. "*Lucifer.*"

"Sorry," I said with an agitated sigh, raking my fingers through my hair. "It's just been a while since my brother has sent an assassin after me. It was due time for another attempt, of course. It's just obnoxious that this time he's sent one I can't kill. How very boring."

Candice approached with the cosmo, and I handed it to Jess while instructing the server to bring anything Mel wanted. “I was hoping we could tag team this and catch up our two love birds together, but it seems we’ll have to split up.”

Jess stretched up on her toes to plant a kiss on my cheek. “That doesn’t seem very fair. I get to catch up with my best friend over drinks, but you get stuck with the righteous celestial lurking in your storeroom with a sword made of fire.”

“I’m used to the short end of the stick, Kitten. In fact, I thrive upon it.”

 LUCIFER

Siren's backroom was a sizable space that sat over the cellar, which I had fashioned into Limbo when I obtained the building. Its only purpose was as storage for all the most popular alcohol, so the staff didn't feel compelled to venture to the land of lost souls every time they needed to fetch a case of watermelon flavored Smirnoff. It was damp, dark, and smelled faintly of sex for all the times the girls snuck a customer back here to screw.

But tonight, the air was ripe with the scent of celestial. It was a distinct stench that I associated with all stuck-up, goody-two-shoes. It reminded me of that overly fragrant scent commonly found in the restrooms of slightly higher-end department stores. "Blood and feathers, Gabriel. I need to introduce you to my friend, Tom Ford." Taking a seat on a box of Jack Daniel's, I took another sip of my whiskey and pretended to hold it up to examine the amber liquid. "He makes an appealing cologne that would cover up the unfortunate stench of *little bitch* you seem to have going for you."

I paused, waiting for him to make his presence known. When he didn't, I rolled my eyes with a growl of a scoff.

"Oh, come on. You can't be so stupid as to think you're going to get the drop on me. Whatever you have planned, you won't succeed, and I warn you, I have little patience for any celestial who dares come at me with that fucking sword. I'm only being polite because my mate cares for you a great deal. So count yourself lucky that her good tastes have seemed to lapse where you're concerned."

In a blink, he was standing at the center of the room. One second he hadn't been there, and in the next, he appeared out of thin air. He was in his celestial form, naked from the waist up. His form was typical of a guardian, a muscular, holy machine of brawn. His white wings were stunning. Even tucked in, they filled much of the room. A lump formed in my throat at the sight of them. In his hand, he held the Flaming Sword of Justice. When Azrael had wielded it, she had to hold it with two hands, but Gabriel could hold it in one. He looked imposing as fuck as he brandished it. But all I could do was curl my lips in disgust as I took another drink.

"I fucking hate that thing."

"Why are we here, Devil King?" he asked, his tone dripping with malice.

I snorted over the rim of my glass. "This is my bar."

"No, asshole. Why did you invite Mel and me here?"

"Because you have something I want."

His face contorted with anger. "If you're talking about Jess—"

"No 'asshole.' I already have her," I seethed through a venomous grin. "I'm talking about the sword. I need you to give it to me."

The celestial looked at me with an unamused glare, like he was waiting for a punchline. When none came, his eyes slanted with suspicion. "And why would I do that?"

"Because you've been fooled into thinking you're working for the good guys. Hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you're not."

"If this is supposed to be a negotiation, you're doing a shit job."

"I'm not negotiating with you because I'm not offering you anything, save for the gift of enlightenment. I trust Jessica likes you for a reason, so I'm going to go off on a limb and assume that you're one of the smarter ones under my twin's thumb. It's time to wake up and smell the evil dictatorship with your coffee."

"I don't trust a single thing that slips off of that serpent's tongue, Devil."

"Oh fuck me, are you always this insufferable? This is why I don't like speaking to my own kind."

Gabriel scoffed. "We are not the same. You stopped being a celestial long ago."

"We're more alike than you'd probably care to think."

"How are we at all alike?"

"Because we've both found our true mates. And we're being persecuted because they aren't what the bosses upstairs approve of. If it wasn't their idea, then as far as they're concerned, it's a sin."

"I'm not being persecuted."

"Only because you were blackmailed, and by my brother, I'm guessing, to kill me in trade for him letting you keep your wings. All while getting the green light to keep bedding her. I don't blame you. It's a pretty damn good deal. But let me ask you something. For a 'righteous' being, do you think it's right that you were only permitted to keep your ward and mate simply because you agreed to commit murder?"

"I agreed to kill Satan!"

"Yes, but why?" I sneered. "What makes me so bad?"

Gabriel faltered. "You—you—"

"Yes, we're getting there. I *what*?"

His shoulders fell, and his blue eyes were cast in the shadow of his shuddering grimace. "You fucked your ward," he mumbled.

"Bingo." I emptied the last of the whiskey, set the bottle down beside me and leaned back against the wall, steepling my fingers. "See? We're not so unlike after all."

"But if Eve was your true mate, why are you bothering with Jessica? Why pull her into your mess of a life?"

"It's a terribly long story, I'm afraid. However, long story short, Eve was never my true mate. Jessica is. I'm going to marry her. And I'm going to get my wings back. You're going to give me that sword so I can kill my brother. Then when that's all said and done, maybe, I'll tell you the full story over drinks."

Gabriel cut the flames of the sword and tucked it in his belt. He leaned back against the opposing wall, folding his arms over his muscular chest. "If you want the sword, we're going to change up the order of your plan there. You tell me the story first. And I'll take that drink now."



I pulled my attention away from Siren's as the limo rolled down Broadway, the old church slipping into the night. Turning from the window, I pinned my gaze on Lucifer, who'd fallen into a pensive silence after he recounted his conversation with Gabriel. "So he didn't give you the sword?"

The celestial's brow slashed with a scowl. "He wants to see my father give me back my wings first. Then he'll hand over the blade. Naturally, I invited him to the wedding. I assumed you'd want him there, even if he wasn't helping me off my brother."

"Of course, I want him there, but I didn't think he'd agree to attend our wedding in Hell."

"I'd actually like our wedding to be on the surface. I'd like a church wedding."

My brows shot up as I held back a laugh. "A church wedding? Don't tell me you want to get married at Siren's?"

His face fell. "What? It's a church. And it happens to be the only one that doesn't burst into flames when I enter."

I smiled sweetly at him, only slightly weirded out by this conversation. "Lucifer Morningstar, we are *not* getting married in your creepy *boob* church. But we can talk about the wedding later. Right now, I want to know where you're taking me."

"Dinner."

"That's the surprise?"

"No, the surprise is who will be joining us for dinner."

He reached for a bottle from a bucket sitting on top of the limo bar and popped the cork. There was a loud pop and a rush of fog steamed up from the bottle.

"Champagne?"

"You're trying to distract me."

His mischievous smirk confirmed my suspicions. "So what if I am? You'll thank me later for getting you good and boozed-up for what's we're about to walk into." My heart prickled with unease as I watched him pour the bubbling liquid into two champagne flutes. Still, I took the glass eagerly when he handed it to me.

"What should we drink to?" I asked.

"Vengeance?" he asked in return, cocking a brow, clearly peeking in on my thoughts.

"Hell yeah, to vengeance." We clinked our glasses together and took our first sips. It was sweet,

tasting vaguely of peaches. Or was it pears? Whatever the aftertaste was, it was damn good. "Shit, this is good. The most expensive champagne I ever had before this was a six-dollar bottle I got from a gas station."

"Please don't recount the vile things you've put in that mouth before I came back into your life."

"Alright, I won't tell you about college then." When I downed my first glass, Lucifer poured me another. I was a mess of nerves and giggles by the time I downed the second. "You're trying to get me completely sloshed for this mysterious dinner, aren't you? I hope they aren't anybody I care to embarrass myself in front of."

A knowing smile stretched my mate's perfect lips, and my whole body burned just thinking about how they felt on my body. "We've got some time before the dinner, actually. I told the driver to take us around the city a few times, so we have plenty of time for you to enjoy yourself and sober up."

I snatched up the bottle from the bar and poured myself my third glass. "Enjoy myself how?"

"By taking your mate's cock right here and now in the car."

His words completely side-swept me, causing me to fumble with the bottle. I dropped it in my lap, and the liquid went everywhere, completely drenching the skirt of my dress. "Fuck! Lucifer!"

The words that tumbled from my mouth as I picked up the spilled bottle and glass had been said without thinking. But it would be just like the devil to take it as an invitation. He moved so fast that one second I was sponging what little of the alcohol I could with a tiny cocktail napkin from the bar, and next, he was on his knees in front of me.

I froze, my body completely paralyzed by the dark look of hunger brewing in his amber eyes, like a maelstrom in a pit of lava.

His hands slipped beneath the fabric of my dress, making my breath seize in my lungs. He held eye contact with an intense look that had my heart slamming hard against my rib cage as he clasped my legs and slowly urged them apart.

"Pull up your dress, Kitten. Show me what's mine." It was as if he had a spell over my fingers, my whole will in his thrall as I moved to obey his husky command.

As I pulled back the dress, he guided my stiletto-clad feet up to straddle the edge of the seat, spreading me wide open. A flutter of excitement pooled in my belly as his eyes centered on the lacy white thong I'd picked out from the selection Nyx had presented me.

"White panties?" Lucifer chuckled, the sound strangely erotic wrapped in his masculine baritone. "Such an inappropriate color. I can't wait to see you wear it on our wedding day."

My heart stuttered as his fingertips stroked my thighs, chased by the graze of his lips to my champagne-streaked flesh. My gaze followed him as his tongue slipped past his lips to lap up traces of spilled alcohol, his lips glistening, the fruity note of peaches coiling with the undeniable scent of my arousal. "I—I thought I might wear red on our wedding day. But now that I think about it, maybe I'll wear white but dress it up with the blood of our enemies."

Lucifer's eyes flicked up to lock with mine, his wicked smile curling against my thigh. "You're so fucking hot. And a little messed up."

"Of course I am. I'm yours, aren't I?"

"That's right, Kitten. You are mine. Now show me what belongs to me."

My cheeks warmed as I hooked a finger into the crotch of the lacy panties and pulled it to the side, the air-conditioned air in the limo mixed with the heated breath of my love tickling my seam. His amber eyes filled with desire as they swept over my nakedness, which was no doubt still red from this morning.

"The scent of your arousal is so goddamn delicious, Jessica. It's a fucking drug. You almost smell

as good as you had that day on the River Styx when you went into heat.”

“The monster inside me was sick of waiting for her mate to wake up and smell the pussy. She figured you needed a little nudge.”

“You’re beautiful,” he rasped. But his eyes weren’t on my face. They were affixed to my spread opening.

“Lucifer,” I murmured softly. “What do you think sex would be like if you were shifted? Since you are getting your wings back at some point...”

“I can’t tell you how many times I dreamed of taking you in my true form. But Kitten, I don’t know if your human form can take my beast form. The last thing I want to do is hurt you.”

“Gabe and Mel do it.”

“If Gabriel has been as reckless as to bed his mate while he’s shifted, then he’s either a closest sadist or his dick isn’t as big as mine. Not to sound conceited. It’s just a guess.”

I frowned and then thought back to the memory Lucifer showed me where he’d shown Eve his true form. Since the memory was from Lucifer’s eyes, I hadn’t seen his celestial endowment, but by the horrified look on her face, it wasn’t anything to sneeze at.

“If anyone can take the monster inside you, Lucifer, it’s me.”

“I’d never forgive myself if I hurt you, Kitten. Ever.”

“As long as I’m with you, I’m unbreakable.”

“You’ve always been that way. With or without me, Lilith. And gods below, do I love you for it.”

Hearing my old name stirred something deep and ancient inside me. My beast let out a low purr that rumbled up from the depths where she resided within me. Then, she came forward. It was as if she was throwing me over into the passenger seat, and suddenly, I lost all control. It was a feeling I remembered from forever ago. Her taking control should be impossible, not without my wings. But somehow, even if she couldn’t shift, she took over me.

“Lucifer, King of Hell.”

My voice, or Reckless Jess’s voice rather, took me by surprise. It was still my voice, but it had a gravelly cadence, all low and sexy. Like something you’d hear on perfume commercials or a phone sex line.

Lucifer immediately stilled, his muscles tensing. The tendons in his neck tensed, and his pupils dilated. “Jessica?”

His voice was small, almost like he was scared that it wouldn’t be me who answered him.

“My host calls me Reckless. But you may call me Lilith if you wish to distinguish us.”

Part of me knew that if I fought for control, I could get the reigns of my body back from my beast, but I was enthralled by the fact that she managed to squeeze into the driver’s seat even without the ability to shift into her form. The way Lucifer was looking at me, at us, kept me from trying to end this too soon. I wanted to see how this would play out.

“It seems both our beasts possess the ability to come out and control us when their mate is present. That’s fascinating...”

Reckless purred and leaned back in the seat, placing her calves over Lucifer’s shoulder. “Why don’t you let your creature out to play so that he may fuck and fill his mate like The Fates intended.”



Lucifer's beast let out a low, rattling purr that caused my entire body to grow hot and wet all at once. By the way he held his sinewy body, I knew that his own spirit had pushed to the surface, and now we watched as our inner beasts reached to touch one another for the first time in an age.

"My mate, my queen," Lucifer crooned in a deep, mournful growl. The shift in his cadence confirmed this was his beast speaking. "I've craved you for an eon. I've torn apart this realm in search of your new host. Not a night has passed where I have not grieved the absence of your warmth beside me."

"Your search is at an end, my love. You can have my warmth, sink yourself into my heat, and we shall end our aching for one another in a dance of flesh and blood."

"Um, bitch, since when is this how you talk?" I chided my beast.

"Since I'm trying to seduce the spirit of our mate, who's as old as time. Now, shut up, and let me get us some ancient celestial cock."

Shutting up, I sat back and watched as my body moved with slow, sultry movements that I'd feel silly making if it were me doing it. Her hands were in Lucifer's hair, clawing through his inky trusses, the heels of her Louboutins tearing into his back, and her hips swayed in a slow, erotic pattern that had our mate completely mesmerized.

He made a territorial, animalistic sound as his fingers bit into her thighs over the bruises he'd left this morning. He brushed his knuckle over the mark of the devil before hooking a finger into the crotch of the lace panties and ripping them off with one tug. Her hips bucked, and she let out a slick moan as if his savagery made her all the more needy for him.

"Lucifer..." His name on her lips—our lips—was like a prayer on the lips of a damned nun, begging for the devil's mercy.

Lucifer grabbed the bottle of champagne from the bar and dribbled the white liquid onto her opening. She moaned and writhed beneath the trickle of liquid tickling her clit. The sound gurgled and turned to a mewl in her throat when his head dove between her legs, lapping up the sparkling wine with his tongue.

It may have been Reckless in control of the moment, but my senses weren't muted in the slightest. The air in the cab smelled like booze, peaches, and sex. Lucifer's tongue delved deep into her pussy, eating her out like he was a starving man. Each stroke, each lick, each thrust was frantic and wild.

It was like my pussy was some holy vessel, and redemption lay in my pink, swollen depths with the way Lucifer lapped at my arousal.

“Come for me, Demon Queen. Come around your king’s tongue,” he commanded, his voice muffled.

My wall’s quivered and clenched. I was seeing stars as I was pitched over the edge in an eruption of pleasure. Liquid streamed from my cunt, dribbling down Lucifer’s chin. It was hard to say if it was arousal or champagne or both, by the way he pulled back and licked his lecherous grin. “You still taste like damnation, Lilith.”

If she was tired from the soul-stealing orgasm, she didn’t show it. She crawled onto her knees beside Lucifer and pushed him into our seat. Her hands tugged at his belt, and his eyelids went half-massed when she eased his erection out of his slacks. Her thumb ran up the length of it, savoring the velvety smooth feel of his flesh in her hand.

“Perfect, virile male,” she purred.

She secured her mouth around him, taking his whole length. His head rolled back onto the headrest, the most delicious groan escaping him.

His hands sunk into her hair, holding her head there as she sucked him off. As the seconds went by, his fingers dug harder and harder, and I knew he was getting ready to come undone. But instead of unloading into her mouth, he suddenly pulled her up and lifted her onto his lap.

Her hands went to his shoulders, and their mouths clashed in a kiss that shook the whole damn car. She slammed her hips down, penetrating herself on his cock, and it was my scream that left her lips. He filled me so perfectly, the sweet torture of him stretching me, making my whole body quiver around him.

“I fucking love watching you take me into you,” he slurred, drunk on pussy wine and lust.

Our foreheads touched as our beasts looked down to see where we were connected. He slammed me down hard on him, his hips jutting up, his jaw clenching as he released on a heated moan.

Reckless pressed one last, lingering kiss to his lips before thrusting me back into the driver’s seat. I was a sticky, sweaty mess of limbs and still-damp fabric. Lucifer, who was just as disheveled as me, blinked up at me with a thunder-struck expression. “Well, that’s new. Seems like our beasts can come out and play, even without their wings.”

“That has never freaking happened before. She’s always just been an obnoxious voice in my head. She’s never taken over like that.”

Lucifer placed me onto the seat beside him and helped me smooth my hair and straighten my dress. “Even in your human body, you still house a powerful demon spirit. A half archdemon at that. Now that you both have your memories back, you’re bound to come into some new abilities, even without your wings. Especially now that you’re back with me. You’re still the Queen of Hell, mortal or not.”

“Well. We can talk about this later. Where the hell are you taking me tonight?”

“Actually, we’re already there.”

I stared at him, lost for a second. “What?”

“We arrived a few minutes ago. The driver didn’t want to bother us. Which was wise.”

I peeked out the window, seeing that he was right. I’d been so wrapped up in what had just gone down, whatever that was, that I hadn’t noticed that the car wasn’t moving anymore.

“Canlis?” I muttered, my nose wrinkling with confusion. “We’re having dinner at Canlis again?”

“Yes.” Lucifer opened his door, climbed outside and helped me out. I examined my reflection in the limousine’s tinted window, pleased to find my hair was back to looking good. I was still a little

damp from the champagne fiasco, but other than that, I looked presentable.

“But you’ll find that tonight’s dinner isn’t going to be anything like Friday’s.”

“Are you going to tell me who we’re having dinner with?”

Lucifer’s expression filled my stomach with an intense foreboding. Whoever we were dining with, I wasn’t going to get the luxury of knowing what I was about to walk into.

My devil offered me the crook of his arm, and we began our walk up the path. Once again, the restaurant looked to have been reserved for tonight’s occasion, leaving the place eerily empty. A staff member in a tux opened the door for us, and I saw him the moment I walked in, seated at a table all alone, at the center of the restaurant.

“Dad!”

“Jess!”

My dad looked great. The color had returned to his face. Even just a couple of days after Lucifer had made good on his end of our little bargain, he looked less skeletal. When he stood to greet us, he didn’t shake. He wasn’t even wearing his oxygen tank.

“Oh my God, Dad. You look amazing!” I threw my arms around my dad, hugging him for what had to have been a solid minute. It felt like it had been three years since I’d seen him, instead of three days.

“I feel amazing, kiddo. Saturday morning, I woke up feeling like a new man. I don’t know what happened, but whatever it is, it’s a darn miracle. I have a doctor’s appointment scheduled for tomorrow. I’m hesitant to throw the remission word around before I get a professional’s opinion, but Jessica, I feel incredible. I’m hopeful that things are turning around.”

I beamed at him, trying to hold back the happy tears that threatened to spill. “I’m hopeful too, Dad. So you’ve met ummm...my boyfriend?”

It’s not like I wasn’t happy to see my dad. I was thrilled, especially seeing him this happy and healthy. He was going to be okay after all, and it was all thanks to Lucifer. But now came the tricky part I’d avoided thinking about until now. Introducing my dad to the devil. Of course, I would never in a million years let it be known to Lawrence Sims that this daughter was dating the devil himself.

My dad turned his attention to Lucifer and grinned. “Lucifer came to the house earlier today and introduced himself as the boy you’d been texting on Friday. You should have told me you’d been seeing him for so long, kiddo.”

I blinked. “Er...”

So that’s what Lucifer had been up to this morning. He’d introduced himself to my dad as my boyfriend.

Calling the king of hell “boy” was funny, seeing as the Prince of Darkness was almost as old as time itself. But that was just something else to add to the list of things Dad could never know.

“I told him how we’ve been seeing each other for several months now, babe. And that I’d been dying to meet him, but you’ve wanted to hold off on introducing us until things calmed down at the hospital.”

“Yes, Lucifer here says now that he’s bought the hospital, you can have any shift you want. Or that you don’t have to work any hours at all if you don’t want to. Must be nice dating the boss!” Dad joked. “So, when is your dad going to get here?” he asked Lucifer. “And don’t worry about that thing you mentioned earlier, with his god complex and all. I’ll play along. I had a second cousin a bit touched in the head. He was convinced he was JKF. He did the accent and everything.”

My gut damn near dropped out of my body. “W–wait.” I whirled to face Lucifer. “Your dad is eating dinner with us tonight? *Your* dad?”

Lucifer tucked a loose lock of my hair behind my ear and gave me a soft smile. “Yes.” He dropped his voice, leaning in slightly so my dad wouldn’t hear. “We have to tell him about our wedding. In fact, I want both of our fathers to attend. Yours so he can walk you down the aisle and mine so he can give me my wings back as soon as we say our ‘I dos’”

“Lucifer, inviting God to dinner isn’t something you just *do*.”

He opened his mouth to respond, but just then, the front door opened.

Standing in the entrance was a handsome, older man with slicked-back white hair in a similar style as Lucifer’s. He wore an all-white suit and leaned on an old-fashioned cane.

“Lucifer, My Son. It’s been too long.”

I watched with dumbfounded astonishment as the literal father of creation strode into the restaurant, his gaze sweeping the establishment with vague interest.

“Father.” Lucifer pressed a smile. I could tell instantly that it was fake as Hell, but his arm came around me, drawing me close to him. My chest swelled as his eyes sparkled with pride. “There’s someone I want you to meet.”

God held up his hand as he took off his jacket and handed it to the host, who was in all likelihood oblivious to whose jacket he held. “Just a second, Lucifer. Let’s wait for your brother before we start making introductions.”

All air in my lungs left me like some invisible asshole had just come up and punched me in the stomach. I looked to my mate, my jaw falling open, and my heart crystallized at the look I saw on his face. “Lucifer, did you invite—”

“*No*,” he said on an icy whisper, so low I could barely hear it. “I wouldn’t have.” His fists clenched into tight balls at his sides. “Jessica. I want you to leave now. I don’t want you to be here. I won’t have you sitting at the same table as—”

He didn’t finish the sentence. He didn’t have to. Because at that moment the front entrance opened again and there stood the man with the face I loved the most. But it was worn by the man who I happened to despise the most, now that Abaddon was lying dead beneath Devil’s Head.

Standing feet away from us, with a maleficent grin that oozed arrogance, was the man who murdered me.

Lucifer’s entire body stiffened as his gaze locked with his twin’s.

“Michael,” he spat like the name was poison in his mouth.

“Hello, Brother...”

The End For Now!

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you so much for reading *Marked by Lucifer*! I know I left you on a huge cliffhanger again but I promise I will be getting you the third and final book in the series ASAP!

If you are enjoying Jessica and Lucifer's story, this is my shameless plea for you to please take a moment to leave a review. Reviews are so important for indie authors like me. They help new readers find my work, plus they let me know I did a good job, what I need to work on, and they inspire me to produce more stories like this one! ♥

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